HOLLYWOOD SAGA

WILLIAM C. DE MILLE

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Cecil B. deMille, on location, directing "The Buccaneer."
Photographed in action by the author, 1937.

HOLLYWOOD SAGA

By

WILLIAM C. deMILLE

With a Foreword by

JOHN ERSKINE

Illustrated with Photographs

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FIRST EDITION

To

CLARA

FOREWORD

WILLIAM DEMILLE's lively account of Hollywood beginnings and progress interests me for many reasons, but chiefly I suppose because he and I have known each other from youth, and what he here tells about I have watched as I could from the outside and from a distance, or I have heard him tell about it before. Now these pages fill in the gaps.

He made his first deep impression upon me in February, 1900. It was then the custom of the senior class in Columbia College to put together and display before the public a comic opera modeled after Gilbert and Sullivan. Our class—William's and mine—produced "The Governor's Vrouw," book by H. Sydnor Harrison and Melville Cane, lyrics by Cane, music by me. It was in two acts. What I recall as the peak of our frenzy, the dress rehearsal, lasted from one o'clock in the afternoon till three the next morning. By that hour—thanks to lapses of memory, ingenious accidents, the tendency of volunteer stage-hands to set the wrong scenery, arguments as to the business previously decided upon, and general differences of opinion as to what the plot was about—we had progressed no further than the middle of the first act. We were not weary, but the coach was; at seven minutes past three his nerves gave way, he began to cry, and he rushed from the theater calling back, "God save you, I can't!"

Knowing little then of the emotional arc through which the stage can swing, I braced myself for disaster the follow-

ing night when we opened at the old Carnegie Lyceum, but our first performance was smooth and brisk, and the coach, a professional, adroit at picking up a cue, puffed a leisurely cigarette behind the scenes and assured us he had known all along it would go well. The unfortunate man died soon afterwards.

Our performance came off not because it was properly rehearsed but because William was in the cast. In this book he refers to the de Mille modesty. What form Cecil's modesty takes, I don't know, but many a time I've seen William deliberately choose a back seat as the best place from which to do the driving. When we started rehearsing "The Governor's Vrouw," we knew he already had considerable knowledge of the theater. What was our surprise, then, when he announced he wouldn't ask for a speaking part; he would be content to play Filching Fox, a mute Indian. According to the stage direction, the Governor's wife, a shrew, was out in the back yard enjoying the moonlight. Filching Fox, bribed by the Governor, stole upon the woman, seized her by the throat so she couldn't yell—that is, not much—and vanished with her into the trackless forest. This action, as you would gather from a disinterested reading of the script, would take half a minute, and Filching Fox had only another thirty seconds before the audience, at the very end, when the Indians, dreading deafness, returned to the Governor his bribe and his lady. Was this a part for our one trained actor?

But when the rehearsing reached this scene, my eyes were opened.

"Where's Filching Fox?" yelled the coach.

William emerged. He had removed coat and vest, he wore a belt, his sleeves were rolled up and his shirt was folded back at the neck. Add puttees or boots, place a mega-

phone in his hand, and he would have been a fully equipped picture-director.

"Now where's that Governor's wife?"

The law student who was to play the leading woman came forward tentatively.

"Put more life in it," advised the coach, "and hold your head up—you're supposed to be looking at the moon. Stand nearer front, so the villain will have room to creep up on you. Lord, but this stage is small!"

"Hadn't he better stand here?" said William, pointing to the center.

"Who's doing this, anyway?" snapped the coach.

"I thought *I* was," said William, in that tone of exaggerated reasonableness with which I have since become familiar.

"Well, what's your act?"

"It has to be seen," said William.

"I suppose so," groaned the coach. "Come, get it over with."

William retired to a corner of the shallow wings and came out doing cartwheels around the fascinated Governor's wife, who kept twisting her head to see what was happening. The magnificent gymnastics brought Filching Fox nearer and nearer his victim until, having prolonged the exhibition to a good minute and a half, he closed in on her—fell on her, in fact—like a circling plate which has lost its momentum; then amidst thunderous applause he heaved her up and shouldered her off, not with the haste you'd expect of a marauder, but treading deliberately, lifting his feet high, as though carrying a log through tall wet grass.

During the other and less vital parts of the performance William gave much good counsel to the cast, set right what

he considered the errors of the coach, and—how can I thank him for it!—broke the news to the company in general that in a stage production there is such a thing as pace, and that when the moment arrives for your entrance, you shouldn't keep the audience waiting.

The success of his early plays delighted his classmates, and we expected him to develop somewhat exclusively as a dramatist. We ought to have known that his talents would make of him a director as well as writer. In 1914 we again faced the public together, and once more to my advantage. That winter, for some performances of the then-existing Columbia University Comedy Club, he staged a little piece of mine, "Hearts Enduring," which by his beautiful skill was endowed, for those performances only, with an effectiveness which astonished me.

Having conferred merit upon my work, he began to admire it, and we started to write a play together. It was to be a comedy and the idea was brilliant, but neither of us can now recall it. The collaboration lasted for one day. Such was our enthusiasm that William got up early, and when I reached his home he was ready for work, dressed for it, in slippers, pajamas and bathrobe, he being one of those authors who strip for mental rather than physical toil. We made progress that morning, digressing only when the superabundance of the inspiration we kindled in each other suggested plays to be written after this one.

At lunch William served a dish of exotic flavor, in harmony with our mood, conveying to a grateful palate the very quality of our blithe thoughts. After lunch, however, our minds flagged, we became dull and doleful, and before sunset I left hastily, carrying home with me as violent a consignment of ptomaine poison as I've ever entertained.

After a sleepless but active night I lay exhausted, think-

ing it over. Had the theater no easier way to get rid of an incompetent author? If William tired so quickly of his collaborator, couldn't he have said so? Or, putting it the other way, do you have to train like Rappaccini's daughter before you can be a dramatist at all?

It wasn't one of those social improprieties that can be ignored. Late in the day I staggered over to William's, rang the bell, and tried to accept the maid's invitation to go right into the study. Midway I clutched the back of a chair, to steady myself. I could hear William approaching. I turned. He too was clutching a chair. Face to haggard face, my glassy eyes were fixed on his. Doubt and suspicion vanished. We fell into each other's arms.

Before he had fairly recovered from the ptomaine poison, he told me he was going to Hollywood. I was one of the friends he mentioned in the book, who tried to dissuade him. He says that Cecil, once committed to pictures, became an immediate convert, heart and soul, but all strong characters believe in their decisions, especially William as I remember him then, sounding the praise of things which did not yet exist. I shall not hear again so ardent a plea for the films, so dazzling a description of what they will develop into, so convincing an argument why we all should bend a shoulder and push. I doubt if the movies have yet caught up with half of what, at that moment, he saw in them.

But to their incredible development he has made, and will continue to make, his contribution. As these pages show, he keeps the grand enthusiasm of his youth, which his friends love in him. Drama is his very breath, and when he isn't writing a play or directing one, he is living dramatically, or pretending to do so—which, as I have at times

suggested to him, is the dramatist's art in its most subtle form.

I like best the autobiographical passages in this book. Perhaps what I have written here will explain why. William's friends, on similar grounds of affection, will all, I think, agree with me.

JOHN ERSKINE

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

In the days of my youth I left Broadway and went to Hollywood for three months. I stayed twenty years.

When I left, there was no first-class picture theater on the Great White Way; when I returned, the Empire Theater alone remained, standing like an old California mission surrounded by glittering homes of picture stars. All other "legitimate" theaters had quietly withdrawn into side streets, either east or west of Broadway, where they now huddle together as if for warmth, while countless thousands of lights on the cinema palaces illumine Times Square and its packed hordes of entertainment seekers, ninety per cent picture-bound.

When I left, theater audiences scoffed at the "movies" as dramatic fare. When I returned, only the strongest legitimate attractions could stand against the competition of films.

A new way of telling a story, a new form of dramatic art had been brought to the people; and their dimes and nickels had grown into mighty millions of dollars organized to supply their demand, until the despised movie of 1914 had grown into the most socially important form of drama in the world.

I call the motion picture an art because I think that today, in spite of obvious shortcomings, it *is* an art. I admit I called it an art in those days when it may still have been merely a craft. Whether my use of the word showed prophetic vision or just desire to be associated with the finer

things of life, I am unable to say. The fact remains that when I left New York for Hollywood in 1914 my friends unanimously agreed that I was committing professional hara-kiri; that I was selling my pure, white body for money (and not enough of that), and that if my name were ever mentioned in the future it could only be in dark and noisome corners, in those Hell's Kitchens where pictures were brewed, and by people lost to all sense of shame and artistic decency. This attitude on the part of my friends merely reflected the way in which motion pictures were regarded at that time by all legitimate writers, actors and producers.

In those days, if an actor had fallen so low that he had to accept motion picture work, he was careful to hide the disgraceful fact from his fellow professionals, for to be seen in a picture meant that he was through on the stage. He would sneak around corners, his hat pulled down over his eyes, a sense of guilt pervading his movements, and slip through the studio door like the public enemy he felt himself to be. Once inside the place, he was safe. There he met only those of his kind, as guilty as he was; unable to betray his secret without confessing their own degradation. Most of the workers were either submerged vaudevillians who had no heights from which to fall, or simple burghers having a good time and getting paid for it. The actor knew his name would never be revealed; no actor's name was ever on the screen at that period. He also knew that none of his friends would ever see his performance, not only because of the disguise he wore as make-up, but also because it was considered beneath the dignity of members of "the profession" to attend such a low form of amusement.

There were, of course, some who took exception to this point of view, a few members of the theater who had begun

to be frankly interested in the new medium of story-telling and who even braved the scorn of their fellows by stating that there might be something in it after all; that the screen might, in time, reach the point of being accepted as entertainment by the better classes.

These visionaries, however, shared that loneliness which is the common lot of the pioneer.

Mary Pickford was one of them. She had turned up at the Biograph studio one day when the then unknown director, D. W. Griffith, had just decided that most actors from the theater were not good screen material; neither their faces nor their methods of acting were ideal for the more intimate technic he was trying to develop. As soon as he saw the fresh, delicate beauty of Mary's face he knew he had found ideal material for his camera. Added to which, Mary was already an experienced actress, having been on the stage with her mother, brother and sister since she was a baby. When she was only fifteen she had played in Belasco's production of my play, "The Warrens of Virginia," in a cast which included my brother, Cecil B. deMille, who played Mary's elder brother.

But she was young enough and pliant enough to learn the new screen technic; and she did not turn up her perfect nose at her salary of five dollars a day which at that time was considered fair wages for capable screen acting. Mary thus became one of the very first of that long list of beautiful young women set upon the road to stardom by Griffith, who was himself the first American pioneer director to realize that story-telling on the screen could be made a dramatic art.

It was against the policy of the General Film Company, which was the motion-picture trust of that time, to allow the names of any of its workers to appear on the screen.

The gentlemen who ran the motion-picture industry in those days were all successful men of affairs, endowed with that uncanny ability to read the future for which American business executives are famous. These astute leaders saw at a glance what a terrible thing it would be if an actor's name, or a director's, became important enough to overshadow the manufacturer's trade-mark. Even in those dark ages they must have had a vision of what would happen if the people who actually made their pictures should ever be in a position to demand a share of the profits, instead of having all the money go to owners and lessees of motion-picture patents.

Thus it was that Mary Pickford became famous before her name was known to the picture public. People began to notice her pictures and to ask at the box office when new ones were coming. She was known as "Biograph's Mary" or "Mary with the long curls," since the parts she played were almost invariably named "Mary"; but it was several years before Mary's audiences were allowed to know the name of their favorite. If this bit of history does not add to our faith in the sagacity of our business leaders, at least it helps us understand why today, when Mary's name is a familiar one in every corner of the civilized world, that of the General Film Company is known only to screen antiquarians.

In 1914, no writers of name were working openly for the screen. Several well-known authors, it is true, had yielded to the temptation of jotting down a few elemental situations for use in the studios, but the writer, like the actor, trusted to the sheltering anonymity of the screen to protect his reputation.

Ever since 1903 the screen had been trying to tell stories. It was in that year that the motion picture liberated itself

from vaudeville houses, where it had been used as a "chaser," to drive one audience from the theater in order to make room for another. People had grown tired of pictures that moved but did nothing else. Waves breaking upon the beach at Atlantic City had ceased to charm; the Empire State Express was no longer exciting; even Niagara Falls had lost its thrill.

But in 1903 "The Life of an American Fireman," in all the glory of its five hundred feet of film, burst upon the gaze of an astounded people. Although this whole stirring biography took only seven minutes in the telling, it was the longest American film ever made, and it pointed the way. The public decided that it wanted films to tell stories with plots, and fiction came to the screen.

But not all at once. It was many years before picture makers began to feel that trained writers might be useful in weaving screen plots. Even in 1914 the story was left entirely to the director's judgment. If he happened to know something of the craft of story-telling, so much the better; but in any case it was his sole responsibility. Under these circumstances, and with no copyright laws to bind them, directors took their own where they found it; contemporary fiction was their oyster and, in most cases, the author was not even notified that his work was to be used as picture material.

In the decade from 1903 to 1913, although the story form of pictures had developed to some extent, it was almost unheard of to attempt a longer film than the fourteen-minute one-reeler which the Trust had standardized. Even a story of the magnitude of "Ben Hur" was shown in one reel and announced as "positively the most superb motion picture spectacle ever made in America." This was in 1907, and one suspects that in spite of its "superb" production

the story must have moved rather rapidly to cover its ground in fourteen minutes.

During this period, several of my writing friends had urged me to pick up some easy pin money by writing scenarios for the studios. Of course it was not "legitimate" work, but producers had begun to discover that short yarns written directly for the screen presented less difficulties in production than fourteen-minute versions of "Ben Hur." Therefore an undercover market had begun to appear for writers willing to accept money for betraying their muse. "They'll pay twenty-five dollars a reel, Bill," said one of these literary outcasts. "You can do several in a day, and they'll protect you by keeping your name out of it."

But my snow-white plume was not for sale. In my ramblings about town I had occasionally passed the doors of "movie shows," which were usually given in vacant shops, hastily and cheaply furnished for the purpose of exhibiting films. Several times I had seen the names of my own plays on signs at the entrance, but such was the contempt in which the movie was held, I had never been interested to go in and see what had been done to my brainchild. The fact that I knew no royalty could be collected probably added to my indifference. It was not until 1919 that the United States Supreme Court established the principle that all screen rights of an author's work belong entirely to the author unless they have been specifically sold.

Looking back, I have found it hard to realize that such fundamental changes in the viewpoint of a whole nation could occur within the time I spent in Hollywood. When I left New York, the profession was asking: "Is it suicide for an actor to appear on the screen?" When I returned, the question agitating Broadway was: "Are the movies killing the theater?"

Today, theatrical producers cannot find plays; all the playwrights are in Hollywood. If they do find a play they have great difficulty in casting it; all the actors are in Hollywood. From a Broadway point of view the Gold Rush of '49 was mere child's play compared to the present Gold Rush which has lured such a large proportion of the theater's talent west of the Rockies in a mad scramble for the yellow metal of Hollywood.

There are even those who proclaim that if the American stage is to be kept alive it must be subsidized by Hollywood; must be regarded largely as a proving ground for plays on their way to the screen; a testing laboratory for actors in which the exact quantity of their sex appeal may be determined. It is at least probable that many of the plays currently produced might never have faced an audience had it not been for movie money which backed them. With the exception of a few sturdy souls, most of those dramatists who write for the stage today seem to keep one eye—the commercial one—fixed upon the screen; let the play fail if it must; they can still live on the proceeds if there is a possible picture in it.

It can have been no small force which in twenty years has made the much derided movies an art more nationally important than the theater; which has actually subordinated the stage to the screen. Living drama has been reduced to the status of a poor relation of the flickering film. The descendant of Shakespeare and Molière is asking alms from the descendant of the nickelodeon and the penny arcade. This can hardly have been due to the depression, nor can we even blame it on the New Deal. No group of financiers has made the screen powerful; if anything, it was more powerful, or at least more independent, when it financed its own pictures out of the takings at the door, before Wall

Street noticed the infant industry and decided that the public should pay more for its pictures than the mere price of the tickets. Nor can we thank the executive brains who have guided the stars in their courses for most of the improvement in pictures and their growth to power. As we shall see, many of the most vital and important changes for the betterment of pictures have been achieved against the better judgment of those rugged individualists who owned the industry, or at least thought they did.

One force alone has been responsible for the present dominating position of motion pictures in the entertainment of this country and, indeed, of the world. That force is the pressure exerted by an audience of seventy million people who go to motion pictures every week in the United States alone. The Music Hall at Radio City in any average week plays to more people than the whole legitimate New York stage did twenty years ago; and this in the very heart of the nation's theatrical center.

When so vast an audience expresses a preference it speaks for the nation—in fact, it *is* the nation; and drama, playing to its few thousands a week, must yield in national importance to the movie, playing to nearly as many millions.

We should remember, too, that first-class drama is inaccessible to most of our population, not only geographically but financially. To the great majority of New York's seven millions, theater prices are prohibitive; and outside of a few large cities there is no living drama. The good business done on tour by a few successful stars or a play known to be a smash hit merely indicates that in two or three days those attractions can draw into one theater all citizens of that district who can afford the price. They couldn't do it week after week; it is in the nature of a spree rather than a habit.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The first motion pictures cost one cent to see in the old penny arcades, but as the show lasted less than a minute, it was really more expensive than the most elaborate work of modern cinematic art. Ten thousand feet of film may be seen today for not more than fifty cents, so that the patron now receives four times as much movie for his money as he did in the very beginning. Not only that; he sees the picture from a comfortable seat, usually in a clean, attractive theater; sometimes in a palace whose splendor warms the cockles of his proletarian heart. No longer does he have to apologize for attending "just to take the children." In the midst of an audience of seventy million, he can find no one to accept his apology.

Motion pictures started by being entertainment for people of small means. That, indeed, they still are, but the well-to-do have joined the audience which has become a mighty cross section of the public, comprising probably more than half the people of our land. But even now the dimes and quarters paid by people of small incomes form the bulk of motion-picture receipts. This insures not only the life, but the health of the screen. No one can tell seventy million people what they may or may not have on their screens. No band of reformers or educators is strong enough to command a majority of the audience. They may, it is true, form groups large enough to make their influence felt, but only if they are liberal enough to represent the thought of millions of their neighbors. The American people is essentially clean-minded, and while minorities may be pleased to see indecency or vulgarity on the screen, the majority vote is so strongly against off-color entertainment that no unclean school of picture-making can long survive. It has been tried by certain producers of the baser sort, and only resulted in censorship, an evil capable of being even

more dangerous than the disease it was intended to cure.

Like all other forms of popular drama, the American movie, to succeed, must express the thought, the point of view, the general psychology of its audience. That has always been drama's function and no doubt it always will be true of any drama of the people. Its deeper purpose is to formulate rather than to form thought; to express to the people what they are thinking rather than to tell them what to think. That is probably why drama has never been successfully used as a medium of propaganda. Not until a subject is already part of public consciousness is it good material for stage or screen. Communistic propaganda succeeds in the Russian theater because the subject is vitally sympathetic to the Russian audience. It does not succeed in the American theater, because most of the audience, if interested at all, are antagonistic rather than sympathetic to the idea, but as Russia settles into her stride and becomes less insistently propagandist, it is more than probable that her drama will again have entertainment as its primary purpose, and not consider itself bound to express first, last and all the time the politico-economic theories of the present-day Russian government.

Whether the voice of the people is indeed the voice of God has always been a debatable point, particularly when two peoples find themselves in violent disagreement. But that the voice of his own people speaks in words of celestial authority to politician and theatrical producer alike no one can deny. It is the voice of the people expressed through seventy million votes every week at the box office which determines the subject matter and quality of what is presented on the screen. Certainly it is not the individual preferences of those capable gentlemen who, nominally, control the industry. They themselves are the first to tell

you that they have to give the public what the public wants. They have tried giving the public what they had been told the public ought to want, but, as a matter of fact, didn't; and each of these noble experiments cost them hundreds of thousands of somebody's dollars. They have hearkened to the voices of the clergy, the educators, even the intelligentsia, and usually with disastrous financial results.

There is only one voice which has power to say "yes" or "no" with absolute finality, and that is the voice of the great majority, which says "yes" in the sweet tinkle of silver coin on the glass ledges of cashiers' windows, and says "no" by a deep and catastrophic silence. American crowd psychology is the only real chaperon of the screen; and censors, educators and reformers are useful only to the extent that they interpret mass likes and dislikes, which, in most cases, they fail to do.

Producers, taken as a whole, are no more responsible for the virtues of the screen than they are for its faults. Taken as a whole, their function is to supply popular demand. There are, of course, some producers who try to stimulate a demand for higher values, as there are some who are content with the least valuable product they can sell, but in both cases they have to work within fairly definite limits which the public establishes. A pound of caviar sells for no more than a pound of cheese, and usually costs more to produce.

If the screen has been growing so rapidly and so powerfully in national importance, while the stage has been dwindling, like a drying trout stream, to a few isolated pools in which fish may still be caught, it is not unfair to say that the brains which have organized and dominated the motion-picture business are probably no more massive,

profound or artistic than those which have had the legitimate theater in charge.

As one who, man and boy, has followed the history and development of the screen for more than twenty years, it has been interesting to see how the public has adopted this new dramatic form for its very own. How, step by step, the people have supported and encouraged those pioneers who made innovations to their liking, and how completely they have checked those who would have fashioned the new art into forms which they disapproved.

Once a picture reaches the screen, it is easy to tell whether the public likes it or not, but it is not at all a simple matter to tell *why*. If it were easy to analyze the reason why any given picture succeeded or failed, there would be few bad pictures. Every picture, like every play, has an individual soul, a personality which is composed of various elements: story, direction, acting and public taste at the moment. Whenever one picture makes a distinct hit, there is a concerted rush to follow its pattern, be it a story of gangland or an adolescent tale by Louisa M. Alcott. As a rule, the more closely a success is copied the bigger the flop of its imitator. Enough attention is not paid by the analysts to those subtle values which make one gangster yarn a hit while a similar gangster yarn fails utterly.

If a woman has been happily married to a man, tall, blond and weighing two hundred pounds, it is no guaranty of a second happy marriage that the man again be tall, blond and a two-hundred pounder. A human equation is involved which many producers seem unable to recognize. Nor can we even count on the stars as a guaranty of success, since any star may gain prestige in one picture only to lose it in the next. It is an axiom of the profession that three bad stories in succession will kill the most popular

star alive. It is not enough that actors and director be fitted to a particular story; the resulting picture must be fitted to its audience, and there's the rub.

No producer, no director either on stage or screen, can be sure of audience values in a story until the audience gives its answer. Nor can the audience itself really tell why it likes a picture, any more than it can tell why it likes a piece of music. The reaction to drama is emotional rather than mental; instinctive and not deliberate. Even the experts themselves have sometimes gone mad trying to figure out just why audiences reacted to certain pictures in the way they did.

Progress in the art of motion pictures has been directly brought about by the people, much more than it has in any other art. For no other art, not even music, is so dependent on immediate acceptance by such a vast audience. If a book sells fifty thousand copies over the whole country in one year, that book is a marked success; if a play is seen by half a million people in its first season, it is a smash hit; but the motion picture must reach an audience of many millions in its first few weeks if it is to return its production cost. Therefore it must deal with values so elemental as to be a part of every man; it must have its roots deep in the soil of human nature, it must avoid subjects and motives which cannot be understood and accepted by the majority. The basic limitation of drama is that it must stay within the psychology of its audience.

Public influence on motion pictures is not that of a few leaders crying "do this" or "do that"; it is more like a landslide, moving definitely in a certain direction, impossible to argue with and fatal to oppose in person. It is unconscious mass movement, even though caused by emotional reaction.

The people own motion pictures in a way and to a degree that they own no other art. Pictures are their especial property, their darlings, their wards. They will not permit anyone to do anything to pictures unless they give consent. It has been so from the first; it will always be so. Dictators may dictate to the screen, but the result is failure unless sustained by majority vote.

Watching all this come about occupied twenty of the most interesting years of my life, but I find the story difficult to set down in any sort of order. Pioneers seldom leave diaries; they are too busy getting to the next camping place. Soldiers in the trenches don't know much about the war; they are doing the shooting, not planning the battle. Therefore I will not attempt to go into the screen's political and business history; I am merely a commentator, not an historian, and this field has been splendidly covered by my friends: Terry Ramsaye in two wonderfully well-informed volumes, and Ben Hampton, who knew the politics and the business end of pictures better than I can ever hope to know them. I write as a lover of the drama who left the theater, for a time, in order to stay with the audience. Never for one moment have I regretted giving such a large portion of my professional life to do what I could in helping to develop this new form of art, in whose destiny and importance I have always believed.

Twenty years of thrilling work are not easily forgotten. My memory is filled with the faces and voices of that host of comrades with whom I had the privilege and the joy of working. We were like an English garrison in India; speaking a different language, isolated, intent only upon our objective. We talked, breathed, lived and ate pictures. Stars were not important in those days nor was there much

money to spend. We were held together in the fraternal bond of a common purpose.

Pictures had to grow, they had to be "bigger and better," an audience of millions was waiting for them to grow up. And we were the people doing the job. Our paths were uncharted, we had to find the way ourselves. There were no old masters to serve as models, no Shakespeares, Molières nor Ibsens. No self-respecting cameraman ever called the celluloid anything but "fillum." The word "cinema" was sort of sissy. The thrill of the pioneer was ours in full measure, and out of all the sweat and dust, the adventure and the danger, the ceaseless work with its discouragements and its triumphs, slowly grew a new art.

I have seen that art born, seen it grow to maturity in the last days of the great silent pictures; then, with the coming of sound I have seen it born again, go through another childhood and reach a second comparative maturity. And, as I write, only ten years have elapsed from the birth of sound films to the picture of today. This would indicate that such art as the silent picture possessed was not lost, as was feared at first, but has served as an essential foundation upon which the modern picture has been built.

During all those years in the trenches, in the drive and confusion of the fight, it was difficult to get a broad view of the battlefield. Methods that seemed tremendously important at the moment, frequently proved to be of little value; experiments which failed at first, later became accepted technic; ideas which got off on the wrong foot, new technical principles used without dramatic perspective, were later brought to perfection.

I can remember what happened, and, now that I am out of the trenches, I can begin to see *why* it happened. But as I look over a modern studio with its thousands of workers,

its highly organized departments, its industrial efficiency and its general belief that it takes nine tailors to make a manuscript, I find myself wondering whether something spiritual has been lost, the thing that bound us together in the old days: romance.

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HOLLYWOOD SAGA

CHAPTER I

In the late summer of 1913, four young men were having lunch together at the Hotel Claridge on Forty-fourth Street and Broadway. The quartet was destined to make motion-picture history, though none of them suspected it. The group consisted of two theatrical men, a glove salesman and a lawyer; their ages ran from twenty-six to thirty-two.

The theater was represented by my younger brother, Cecil B. deMille, and his friend, Jesse L. Lasky; the glove salesman was Lasky's brother-in-law, Sam Goldfish, now known as Samuel Goldwyn through his having combined his name with that of the brothers Selwyn in a wise choice of syllables; and the lawyer was Arthur Friend, an intimate crony of the other three.

Times had been hard that summer both for Cecil and for Jesse. In the years just preceding, Cecil had abandoned his profession of acting because he was determined to be a producer in the theater. He had produced a succession of plays, ranging from cheap melodrama to high-class comedy, all of which had at least one element in common: a complete lack of power to please the public. He had been more successful in producing for Lasky several brief operettas in vaudeville, but at the moment the world looked dark; his latest play had followed its predecessors into oblivion and his bank account suggested the deep, red glow of a western sunset.

Jesse Lasky, too, was feeling far from optimistic. He had

started his professional life as a cornet player, and at one time had the distinction of being the only white member of the Royal Hawaiian Band. Progressing into vaudeville, he became a successful producer of musical acts in all of which he had the help and remarkably valuable advice of his sister, Blanche, one of the best judges of "audience value" I have ever met.

But recently he had taken all his savings from vaudeville, which by that time amounted to a fairly large sum, and, in partnership with Henry B. Harris, had invested it all in the Folies Bergère, a combination restaurant and music hall after the Parisian manner. The idea was to bring a bit of the real Paris to New York, but New York promptly demonstrated that it preferred to take its Paris in France. The venture was a disastrous failure, and young Mr. Lasky, completely divested of cash, was again facing an unappreciative world.

Sam Goldfish, having married into the show business, was beginning to find it more exciting, if less secure, than selling gloves. He was only twenty-six but was already looking for larger worlds to conquer. One intimate taste of the theater frequently turns a hard-headed business man into a gallant adventurer, and Sam had begun to feel yearnings which he felt could never be completely satisfied in the glove business.

But it was Arthur Friend, a young lawyer of considerable vision, who had begun to notice the crude, jittery movies of that time, who had remarked the growth of popular interest in them and, most important of all, had made himself familiar with the business statistics of film production.

For some little time Arthur had been trying to interest the other three in motion pictures, but so far without success. Cecil and Jesse both felt the humble movie far beneath

their abilities as theatrical producers; Sam, the business man, was dubious about its permanence. In previous discussions only Blanche Lasky Goldfish had seen any merit in Arthur Friend's suggestion that the boys look into it seriously.

All through this historic luncheon Arthur had been using his training as a lawyer to convince the others that there was a future in motion pictures. He told them about Pearl White, then at the height of her popularity in "The Perils of Pauline"; he described the eagerness with which the country's youth awaited each new peril as it appeared in serial form; he explained that the fair Miss White was, at the moment, the best-known woman in the world, Pauline's perils having proved enthralling to every nation which boasted a cinema, including India and Arabia, and her face having become as familiar in China and Japan as in Norway and Sweden.

"What of it?" said Cecil. "Suppose her face is as well known as the little behind of the baby whose mother wouldn't use that wool soap; is it *art?*"

"It will be—when artists get the idea."

Sam looked thoughtful. "It's an audience, anyhow; if I only felt sure pictures weren't just a fad—"

"If they're a fad, they're a pretty healthy one," replied Arthur. "Look what that Italian picture 'Quo Vadis' did this spring at the Astor; turned 'em away at a dollar admission. And it's cleaning up all over the country."

"Like a trained dog that plays the piano," Cecil cut in, "it isn't the quality of the music but the fact that a dog is trying to play it, and that's what happens when movies try to tell a dramatic story."

Gloom settled about the table: Arthur was finding his

cause hopeless; Cecil was thinking how unpredictable was the taste of American audiences; Jesse was mentally laying another wreath on the grave of the Folies Bergère, while Sam was considering the point that, whatever vicissitudes affected the world of art, people would always need gloves.

My brother finally broke the silence: "Anyhow, I'm sick of the whole damn show business; the only thing in the world that I feel like doing is to go down to the South Sea islands where I can lie under a tree all day, and for ten cents a year get a little native boy to pick all the breadfruit I can eat. That's Life; that's living; no theaters, no box-office statements, no actors who can't act, no writers who can't write; nothing but the sea and the sand and plenty of time to sleep."

Jesse's eyes sparkled. "I'll go with you, Cecil," he said wistfully, "only you'll have to lend me the ten cents a year."

Sam said nothing; the prospect which appealed so strongly to the others held no charm for an active business man.

"As for motion pictures," continued Cecil B. deMille, "if I want to commit suicide, I feel sure I can find a much less painful and more honorable way."

He rose majestically to go, followed by Jesse and Sam. Only Arthur Friend, the host, kept his seat.

"Wait a minute, boys," Arthur pleaded. "I haven't shown you the financial possibilities of this new game; let's have one more cigar and talk it over."

Cecil and Jesse looked at each other; after all, motion pictures were only motion pictures, but a good cigar was still a smoke. I suspect that through their minds swept the thought:

> It isn't the shame and it isn't the blame
> That burns like a white hot brand;
> It's coming to know that you haven't a show,
> Haven't a possible chance of a show,
> Not even a one-night stand.

At any rate, they resumed their seats as the cigars were ordered. Under their mellowing influence and Arthur's soothing voice chanting attractive statistics, the despised movie began to look more like a diamond in the rough, an artistic frontier which needed only the daring and skill of such pioneers as he was now addressing to be made into a settled land of glorious entertainment for the whole people.

There was that young man, recently in the fur business —what was his name? Oh yes, Adolph Zukor, who last year bought the American rights of that French four-reeler, "Queen Elizabeth," with Sarah Bernhardt, and when the movie trust closed their houses to him, actually had the nerve to hire legitimate theaters to show the picture and reached thousands of people who would never think of going to a regular picture house.

This young man Zukor, it seemed, had big ideas; he had organized a company called "Famous Players," and was going to take the best stars of the theater and put them into picture versions of famous plays.

"He'll have a sweet time getting 'em," said Cecil scornfully. "No important actor would do it."

"You're wrong, Cecil," said Arthur. "Ever since some of the critics praised the Bernhardt film and 'Quo Vadis,' actors are beginning to take a chance; and now Dan Frohman is persuading James K. Hackett to make 'The Prisoner of Zenda' for Zukor."

Cecil and Jesse looked impressed; if people like Bernhardt and Frohman were taking this thing seriously, perhaps it

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Cecil and Jesse looked impressed; if people like Bernhardt and Frohman were taking this thing seriously, perhaps it

was not quite so far beneath contempt as they had thought. Certainly the possible financial returns as described by Arthur were far from unattractive. By this time the cigars were about finished.

"I tell you what, Jesse," suggested Cecil. "Before we turn the proposition down flat, let's go out and *see* one of the damn things."

"Absolutely," said Jesse. "We owe that much to Arthur. I'm game if you are, Sam."

"Let's go." Sam always believed in action.

So they went and saw the nearest picture. An hour later, when they emerged from the theater, Jesse turned to Cecil speculatively. "What do you think, Cecil?"

Cecil was frowning thoughtfully; he wanted to be fair, but felt that he must be truthful. "Well," he said with characteristic deMille modesty, "I don't know anything about pictures, but if I can't do better than *that*, I ought to be shot at sunrise."

Thus was brought about the entrance into the motion picture field of three of its most important pioneer producers.

The boys lost no time in getting right down to business; within a few weeks the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company was organized with a total cash capital of approximately twenty thousand dollars. Jesse, as a well-known and established impresario of vaudeville, became president. Sam was vice-president and business manager; Arthur, secretary and legal adviser, while Cecil acquired the mouth-filling title of Director-General.

The announced policy of the new company was to make "feature pictures" only, by which was meant pictures four or five reels in length, whose running time would be an hour or more. This was in itself a daring innovation, almost

all pictures of that time being one- and two-reelers. The General Film Company controlled most of the picture theaters and had set its foot down hard against any length greater than two reels. This Trust, with no particular capital invested except what had come out of the business itself, was making an annual profit of fifty to sixty million dollars. Its executives gave no heed to the men in the studios who had begun to sense public demand and support for "bigger and better" pictures. Instead, the Trust was content to let well enough alone; it was making a vast fortune with one- and two-reelers, and any change of policy might prove dangerous. In fact, it carried this idea so far that when a daring producer imported from Europe "The Life of Moses" in five reels, the Trust would only let it be shown in its theaters at the rate of one reel each week, which, naturally, caused the film to fail dismally but gave those far-sighted executives a magnificent chance to cry, "I told you so."

One or two daring independents had attempted longer films but, with most theaters closed to them, had not been able to make them pay. A very few had been imported with more success, as the importers didn't have to pay production costs.

To most of the picture public, however, the longer film was an unknown quantity, so when the new Lasky company committed itself entirely to a policy of four- and five-reel features, it was almost alone in the field. Young Mr. Zukor and his Famous Players were the only other advocates of features, and they, too, were just beginning.

Such was the general condition of the motion-picture world when our youthful quartet of adventurers joyously decided to "buck the Trust" and make their pictures for such market as scattered independent theater operators

could offer. With absolutely no experience in the field they were entering, with no technical knowledge of pictures and practically no political knowledge of the situation, and with cash limited to twenty thousand dollars, they calmly set out to tie into true-lovers' knots the tentacles of an octopus which felt perfectly at home in his cave and had a war chest of sixty million dollars per annum.

I have since wondered whether a little more knowledge would have deterred them. I am inclined to think not. Youth they had to a pronounced degree, and energy—ye gods! what energy! To this day my brother is a human dynamo which never seems to run down, as anyone can testify who has ever worked with him on a big production; the impossible attracts him as honey, high in the tree, attracts a bear. It is this quality which made him such a valuable leader both in technic and technology in those fighting early days.

It was quite characteristic of him then, in 1913, that once he was committed to motion pictures they became, overnight, the most important form of art in the world; somewhat crude perhaps, but that was exactly why the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company had been formed. It took Moses forty years to lead his people out of the wilderness; well—just watch how long it would take the Lasky Company to lead motion pictures to the Promised Land.

By the time the company was fully organized Cecil had seen several more pictures and was beginning to talk as an expert. As Director-General of the new concern, he was to have absolute charge of the studio, when they got a studio, and was to be personally responsible for all the company's pictures, when the company began to make pictures. His word on all matters of production was to have the absolute finality of a czar's ukase. These important matters being

settled, and "C. B." (as everyone soon began to call him) being lord of a studio which he was yet to create, the next order of business was to decide upon the subject of their first picture and to choose an important star to play it.

Some years before, "The Squaw Man," a play by Edwin Milton Royle, had made a sensational hit on Broadway, and the boys agreed that its contrast of London high society background with the primitive setting of the West was ideal for pictures. They arranged with the author to picturize his opus, a proceeding which Royle regarded with some misgivings; and then sought out a young actor, Dustin Farnum, who had carried New York by storm in "The Virginian" and had more recently been successful in "The Littlest Rebel," in which he played with his brother, William Farnum, and a cute little child actress named Mary Miles Minter.

Dustin Farnum they found at the Lambs Club and lost no time getting down to business. "Listen, Dusty," Lasky began, "we've formed a company and we're going into motion pictures."

Dusty looked at them mournfully; he knew they'd been having pretty hard sledding, but he was distressed to hear that things were as bad as this. "You don't tell me!" he said, in a tone meant to convey both understanding and sympathy. "Well—I hope you have all kinds of good luck—"

"We've got 'The Squaw Man,' " said Lasky. "We're going to make a big feature picture of it; five, maybe six reels."

Dusty looked even more concerned. "It's a good play," he said. "I've played in it myself; but I didn't know Ed Royle was hard up."

"He's not," Cecil broke in, his voice vibrant with en-

thusiasm. "We've just shown him the possibilities of motion pictures, that's all, and he's glad to come in with us. I tell you, Dusty, pictures are bound to sweep the country; the public is crazy for 'em; all they need is a few men from the theater, who know real drama and can put it on the screen. Why, just look what the screen can do that would be impossible on the stage. Of course, it hasn't been done yet, but as soon as we get going—"

"Here's the point, Dusty," Jesse interrupted. "We feel we've got a great chance here and all we need is a big Broadway name to star. We want you to play the part; what do you say?"

The handsome star looked a trifle dazed. "You mean you want me to go into pictures, right at the height of my career?"

"It can't do you a bit of harm, Dusty," C. B. answered. "It didn't hurt Sarah Bernhardt any."

The argument went on for hours. Between Lasky's gentle persuasiveness and Cecil's magnetic optimism, and possibly because he had not yet found a new play for the coming season, the actor became receptive to the idea. They offered him one quarter of the company's stock as an inducement, but Dusty was much too shrewd a businessman to be caught that way.

"No, boys," he said, smiling, "all you say may be quite true; I hope it is, but I'll take my five thousand in cash; after all, it'll be a good six weeks' work."

The sum of five thousand dollars to which he alluded was, of course, payment for the whole job, not his salary per week; those times were still in the rosy future.

Now that they had their play and their actor, the question was where to found their studio. Most of the pictures at that time were made either in New York or in Chicago.

Hollywood was practically unknown, but a few of the smaller companies were out there for various reasons, one of them being that the town was near the Mexican border. This was important because of the war then going on between the Trust, which owned all the American motion-picture patents, and the small independent companies who wanted to make pictures without paying tribute to the Trust.

Owing to the fact that Thomas A. Edison had thought disparagingly of the cinema's future, he had neglected to take out European patents on his motion-picture camera. He was only interested in the motion picture as a possible adjunct to his talking machine, which was his real darling. The independents thus were able to buy equipment in Europe which infringed the Edison patents in this country; frequently they used bootleg Edison apparatus which they had secured in unlicensed ways.

The Trust had an amusing habit of using deputy marshals, detectives, or, it is alleged, just plain strong-arm men to seize and destroy any motion-picture paraphernalia which had not been licensed by the patent holders.

The independents established their Hollywood studios, surrounded them by high board fences and lookouts, and at the first sign of approaching trouble the illegal cameras were bundled into fast motor cars and were off for Mexico, where they reposed quietly until the danger had subsided.

It was not for this reason, however, that the Lasky Company decided to establish its studio in the West, but because it had heard that costs were much less than in the East. Land was cheaper; so were labor and materials. But above all, the climate was reported to be amazing.

Sunlight being still the chief illumination used in picture making, it was comforting to hear of a land where

every day was bright and warm, where rain seldom fell, and when it did, usually at night; a place "where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day." These were just the right conditions for a new company which had to be careful of every cent it spent, so Cecil prepared to take his star and cross the Great Divide.

When my brother finally told me that he had definitely decided to enter the motion-picture business, I, as titular head of the family, felt all the sensations of an outraged Southern Colonel whose first-born announces that he is leaving the old plantation to join the Yankee army. The name we bore had been honorably known in the theater for two generations, and now he was going to drag it in the dust of a vulgar, unworthy scheme of coaxing nickels away from poor little children. I suggested that if he really desired to become a cheap mountebank there was open to him the time-honored field of the traveling Punch and Judy show. His answers were not encouraging; he seemed to be unreasonably determined to follow this path of iniquity.

Finally, I appealed to him as a brother: had he no pride?

He gave it as his considered opinion that, in the present state of his finances, pride was at the very end of a long list of things in which he was not interested. He also added, comfortingly, that in any case Jesse Lasky's name headed the new venture; if any name was to be dragged in the dust it would be Jesse's, and that I should not worry; the honor of the family was quite safe in his hands.

He then had the supreme audacity to suggest that I part with five thousand dollars and acquire a quarter interest in the company. I realized at once that up to this moment I had not *really* been shocked. So far naught was lost save honor; this was different.

"Oh, no," I said, with all the wisdom of an elder brother.

"Up to now, I've kept out of your various ventures, and what was the result? Every time you got stranded, I was able to lend you enough to get you and the company back to New York."

"But this looks like a good bet, Bill," he answered. "I really think there's a fine chance in pictures—I mean if the right people get hold of them."

But my uncanny business sense served me as faithfully as usual. "All right, my son," I replied with infinite superiority. "Go ahead if you must. You're so busted you can't lose any of your own money. But also, and by the same token, you're not going to lose any of mine. Go West, young man, and I'll try to save enough to pay your fare back."

He smiled his singularly disarming smile: "Quite sure you don't want to come in with us, Bill?"

"Boy," I replied with lilting humor, "there have been times when I wasn't sure of my name; times when I didn't know whether I was awake or asleep; times when I was all confused as to whether the sun rose in the east or in the west; but this one time I am sure with the deepest certainty a human being can feel: I do *not* want to go in with you."

He went away, still smiling. And I kept my promise. I saved enough to pay his fare back, but he never came back. Years later I used the money to pay my own fare back.

And that quarter of the original Lasky Company, which I so scornfully refused to buy for five thousand dollars, I could have sold about four years later for something over two million.

But my average was good. This was the first time I had been wrong about one of his professional enterprises.

CHAPTER II

A FEW weeks later my brother came to bid me good-by. He was leaving for the West and was full of plans, hope and excitement. His eye had its old sparkle; the theater, with all its problems and discouragements was behind him, forgotten. Forgotten, too, was that island in the South Seas with its little food-providing black boy.

Cecil was now one hundred per cent picture producer, and out there in that he-man's country he would start a new life, a new art, a new fortune. I could even detect in his manner traces of that quiet power which comes only from long days and nights on the parching desert or months alone in the rugged western mountains. His confidence in himself and in the new adventure was pathetic to my older, wiser mind. It saddened me to think of the disappointment, the disillusion, the ultimate failure which probably awaited him.

But I no longer tried to discourage him. It was too late for that; I had spoken my piece before this; he knew all my doubts and fears and if he chose to disregard them—well, he would find in me, from now on, only the brother who wished him well, who was rooting for him and who, later, would help him pick up the pieces and start again, in something more reasonable and more respectable.

His enthusiasm, his eagerness to be on his way to attack the unknown, took me back to a day when he was five years old and I was eight; a day which now stands out in my mind as a perfect illustration of our difference in tempera-

ment. It was at the New York Athletic Club, then at the corner of Fifty-fifth Street and Sixth Avenue. It was Ladies' Day, and the big swimming pool was surrounded by an audience who had come to see water sports, among which was to be an exhibition of life-saving by the swimming instructor.

Cecil and I were pupils but neither of us could swim. It had been arranged for us to jump off the springboard into deep water and, after splashing helplessly for a moment, be rescued by Gus, the swimming teacher, as an object lesson in methods of handling non-swimmers with safety. All this was explained to the crowd while C. and I, in our little swimming trunks and bathrobes, heard our names announced and waited for the word to go.

Cecil was called first as the eyes of the audience focused upon him, and I could see, in the front row, our parents' faces: father's proud smile and mother's nervous glance of encouragement. Without hesitation the plump, fair-haired little five-year-old, with an immaturely regal gesture, tossed aside his robe, took a good look at the crowd, rushed out on the springboard and leaped blindly into space. He knew he was going to land in deep water, but had sublime faith that he would be pulled out amid tumultuous applause, which was exactly what happened.

Then came my turn. Having been impressed by the reception accorded my younger brother, and not wishing to be outdone by him in personal bravery, I too dropped my robe with dignity and started at a good pace for the jumping-off place. But, somehow, in the two seconds which elapsed before I got there, I began to realize the depth of the water. Gus might make a mistake, or possibly have his attention distracted and not notice me until it was too late. Wouldn't it be terrible for mother to see me drown right

before her eyes! This mental process evidently affected my physical progress; as my thoughts moved faster and faster my legs moved more and more slowly; by the time I reached the springboard's end I was experiencing all the sensations of death by drowning. I paused to complete the thought. Then I became conscious of the audience waiting. Nothing was happening, and it was up to me to do something about it. I saw father's face; he looked rather disappointed, if not just a bit disgusted. Mother's expression conveyed a mixture of gentle understanding and regret. At this point I jumped, for the simple reason that I was afraid not to.

This early scene recurred to me vividly as I saw Cecil fare forth into the West. There he was, jumping blindly again into space, smiling, self-confident, with the same love of adventure, the same firm belief that whatever the obstacles, he would overcome them. In this spirit he took his twenty thousand dollars, his star and a young man who, having been Farnum's dresser in the theater, now found himself suddenly promoted to the post of studio manager, as soon as there should be a studio, and went blithely out toward the sunset. My little brother was Director-General of a picture company after having devoted some six weeks to an academic study of his new profession and having seen, in all, possibly two dozen pictures.

After much careful consideration, the boys had decided that Flagstaff, Arizona, was just the place to build their studio. It certainly looked good on the map; government weather statistics proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that it was ideal. Also, some stool pigeon had hinted that it occasionally got foggy in California. There would be no fog in Arizona, however. Just look at the altitude, nearly seven thousand feet; no fog up there, you bet—why, it was way above the clouds and every day would be clear sunlight

The Author (R) and the Director General in 1888.

William and Cecil deMille at the Lasky Studio, October, 1914.

A "Rose of the Rancho" group. Left to right: Horwitz, (asst. director), Garcia, Mrs. McCord, C. B., Horace Carpenter, Bessie Barriscale, "Charlie," Miss Darwell, and Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins.

Photographed by the author, 1914.

Scene representing U. S. House of Representatives in session. Shot on the old Lasky stage without walls or roof and no artificial lights.

Photographed by the author, 1915.

from dawn to dusk. Moreover, it was five hundred and forty-three miles nearer New York; look what that would save in time and transportation alone.

It was rather a shock, therefore, to the Director-General when, followed by his faithful army of two, he descended from the train at Flagstaff and stepped into the midst of a raging blizzard. Evidently high altitude had certain disadvantages during the late fall and winter months. Snow lay deep on the ground and swept through the air, driven by a sharp mountain wind. What little could be seen of the town consisted mainly of small, one-story wooden buildings; it looked forlorn, desolate, cold.

"It's hard to judge at first glance, Dusty," said the Director-General thoughtfully, "but, somehow, this doesn't strike me as the perfect spot in which to make motion pictures."

Dusty shook the snow out of his eyes: "Anyhow, it's not fog."

"No," said C. B., "fog, at least, disappears as quickly as it comes; this snow is going to be here for weeks."

A bell signaled the train's departure; decisions had to be made quickly. "Hi boys," shouted C. B. to the baggage men, "put those trunks aboard again; we're bound for California."

They arrived between two periods of "unusual" weather; the state was living up to its reputation: delicious, warm sunlight; a soft, semi-tropical breeze; the dry desert smell in the air. It was perfect.

Bearing in mind the Company's slender resources in searching for a studio site, C. B. discovered an old barn out on Vine Street in Hollywood. It was surrounded by orange and lemon groves, and there the Lasky Company decided to build its studio. The barn, with very little expense, was

turned into executive offices, property rooms and various informal corners which were dignified by the name of "departments."

Out among the lemon trees a stage was built; not at all a motion picture stage such as we think of today, but a small wooden platform upon the bare ground, without walls or roof. In place of these were light canvas "diffusers" which could be handled like window shades to control the sunlight. A row of dressing rooms was built of light plasterboard, with just enough wooden framework to keep the whole affair from collapsing in a stiff breeze. There was, of course, no heat; that would have been insulting to their newly adopted state. Under these conditions, the young company started work.

At this time, not only was the Trust fighting the independents, but the independents themselves were fighting one another. Every man's hand was against every other man; there was plenty of espionage in the studios, each company feeling in duty bound to place one or more spies on the payrolls of its competitors, particularly in those departments where any new process or improvement in technic would be known. Methods were crude and rough but were developing rapidly, and the mortal fear of every studio manager was that one of his rivals would put some new effect on the screen which was unknown to his own technicians. This state of affairs had developed a spirit of competition more intense than sporting. Sabotage was not unknown; the main idea was to beat the other fellow, and fair means were only used as a last resort; every studio was as full of secret intrigue as a Central-European diplomatic embassy.

News having gotten about that a group of high-brow theatrical men was about to invade the field, bringing

along a high-priced star, word had evidently been passed that the new company was not to be allowed to succeed. As far as I know, there has never been the slightest proof that the Trust had any representatives among the various spies and saboteurs in the freshly-organized Lasky plant; the most that can be said, in fairness, is that the Trust was definitely opposed to a policy of feature pictures such as the Lasky Company was preparing to make, and that, if the Company should by chance fail, the Trust's grief would be notable for its restraint.

During those difficult first weeks, when the studio was being built and its personnel collected, my brother showed his genius for organization and his power to inspire loyalty in his assistants and employees. Some of the men and women he gathered together for that first picture are still working for the Paramount Studio, the lineal descendant of the old Lasky Company. C. B. is known as a hard task-master, but his people have always given him that absolute allegiance which is called forth only by true leadership.

Finally, after long labor and many difficulties, "The Squaw Man" was shot; that is to say, the camera work was finished and the picture was being cut, which means assembling the various, short individual scenes into smoothly flowing continuity. It had been something of a race between the completion of the picture and the extinction of the bank account. There were days when unavoidable delays made it appear certain that the money would be dead and gone before the film was safely born; but now it was finished and the Company still solvent.

The spies had, no doubt, been busy enough, but the saboteurs had been waiting for this moment. When the picture was ready to be shown, the Director-General, flanked by his assistants, sat in the darkened projection

room ready for the thrill of seeing his first screen work in its entirety. As the picture flashed on the screen, Cecil got one of the biggest thrills of his young life, but not at all the kind of thrill he expected. Scenes that had been perfect in the daily "rushes" now appeared before his eyes with strange marks and scratches throughout their length; frequently large, jagged, black patches indicated holes in the emulsion. The saboteurs had done their work in the cutting room; they had done it thoroughly, and most of the negative had been wrecked by being drawn, none too gently, between the workman's heel and the cutting-room floor.

It was disaster. The money was gone, and all the Director-General had to show for it was five thousand feet of perfectly useless film. For the first time since he had come West, C. B. looked squarely into the murky, red eyes of failure.

There was only one thing to be done: the picture had to be made all over again, and somehow, by hook or crook, another twenty thousand dollars had to be raised. It was impossible, but it just had to be done.

It is in crises like these that the telegraph and telephone companies look with paternal affection upon the motion-picture studios. The greater the crisis, the longer the wires and phone calls. In fact, it would be a humane gesture if, in every Western Union and phone office, a sign could be illuminated whenever the eight-hundred-word wires and fifty-minute transcontinental phone calls begin to come thick and fast from the studios; the sign might read: "Don't cheer, boys, the poor fellows are dying."

In New York, Sam Goldfish, Jesse Lasky and Arthur Friend received the dire tidings with white faces. Their company was busted, ruined, completely sunk. Then their jaws set. They were pioneers, and what had happened was

merely a first attack by the redskins. They'd show 'em, by Heck! With the Western Union lending delighted assistance, plans were discussed by wire and the Director-General was instructed to keep his ship afloat; money would be raised.

How that second twenty thousand was acquired has always been something of a mystery to me. Whenever I asked about it later, a sly, furtive look would appear on the boys' faces. There were no unsolved bank robberies at this time; neither was there a sudden influx of counterfeit bills in Hollywood. I imagine they took the money out of a hat, which first had to be passed to all their friends and acquaintances, and even to a few perfect strangers.

Of one thing, however, I am quite certain: no part of these fresh funds was derived from me. I saw my original prophecy of failure coming true. Having been wise enough months before to predict just what would happen, I was not going to throw good money which I still possessed after the bad money I had refused to put up in the first place. I was quite eager to give the boys aid, comfort, succor, and priceless words of shrewd advice; but no money—absolutely.

So, once more, the ship set sail without me, and C. B. made the picture over again. This time, he knew what to expect from the playful but effective rivalry of his competitors. He took no chances; no one could get a job in the laboratory without showing his birth certificate, a portrait of his mother and a letter of praise from the village pastor. As a further precaution, two negatives were made of every scene: one for the film vaults and the other to be taken home every night by the Director-General in person. On two occasions he was shot at while carrying the film to his house. Such were the merry, carefree days of the picture business in Hollywood, twenty-five years ago.

When "The Squaw Man" was completed for the second time and the new negative was to be cut, my brother decided to be present during the operation. It must have been nervous work for the cutters. C. B., with a large revolver strapped on his hip, occupied the cutting room and watched every foot of the film handled. He looked as if he meant business, and I have no doubt he did. The sabotage which the first film had undergone, the double expense of the picture with the Company's fate hanging in the balance had wrought him to such a pitch that any suspicious move on the cutter's part would have produced results, the rights and wrongs of which could only have been decided by a coroner's jury.

For forty-eight hours C. B. sat up, with little food and no sleep, as the cutting proceeded. They were pressed for time because of the delay in finishing the picture, and no rest was allowed; the film had to be on its way to New York in a day or so. For several months the Lasky Company had been paying the bills. It had spent twice its original capital, with not one cent of income from anything. There was barely enough left to hold the organization together until the picture was sold, and the Director-General knew that to ask his three partners for any more money at this time would have made him morally responsible for three deaths by heart failure.

It was a tired but relieved C. B. who finally saw the last cut spliced and the film safely on its way East. He was a bit shy on sleep, but there were no heelmarks in his film this time. As he traveled to New York with months of work and forty thousand dollars worth of capital all in five little tin boxes which were constantly under his personal observation, he wondered. The picture had cost twice as much as had been planned. Could it be sold for what it had cost?

Could the Company ever get its money back? Were they saved, or ruined?

They would know the answer when the film was shown to the trade at the Longacre Theater. There the "States'-rights Buyers" would see it, and each would bid whatever sum he felt was justified for the right to exhibit the picture in his particular territory. If the sum total of these bids came to more than forty thousand dollars the Company made money and the goose hung high; if it came to less than forty thousand—the Company *was* the goose. The method of selling pictures by which a picture producer could share in the profits of his film on a percentage basis had not yet been invented. The producer had to accept a flat sum, out of which his profit, if any, must come. If the picture then made an outstanding popular hit, the distributor and the theater made all the big profits, while the producer had to be satisfied with glory, and what business value there was in the enhancement of his reputation.

I was among the audience which gathered in the Longacre Theater to see the first showing of "The Squaw Man." It was now late in the spring of 1914 and, so far, I had seen nothing and heard little of my brother's work in his new field. I had never seen a picture which told a full-length, dramatic story such as I was used to in the theater, or told it with emphasis on drama rather than on physical action. In fact, I still didn't see how it could be done, but I knew how much this picture meant to C. B. and I attended partly out of family loyalty, and partly to give him just the right words of affectionate sympathy when the ordeal was over.

The house darkened and the picture began to appear. Much to my amazement, I found myself first interested, then held and finally moved by it.

Of course the film broke several times; in those days

films always broke several times and the familiar sign, "One moment, please," was expected to entertain the spectators until a splice could be made; but in spite of this, and a musical accompaniment which paid little attention to what was happening on the screen, the story held; it was essentially *drama*, the acting restrained and realistic, the emotional climaxes poignant. When I found myself with a tear in the eye and a catch in my throat, I knew something important was taking place. Never before had a motion picture affected me as a depiction of real people with genuine emotions.

Seen today, the picture would be considered terrible in its crudity, as indeed would any picture more than ten years old, so rapidly has cinematic technic advanced, but in those days, when realistic drama on the screen had not even been attempted, the effect was a revelation.

As I sat in that dark auditorium and felt the ebb and flow of the play, just as if it were being played in the flesh before me; felt, too, how it was holding the whole audience until they were under its spell as much as they could have been in the living theater, I had my first vision of what this new art was bound to become; how it was, inevitably, to serve untold millions of people. In spite of its obvious faults, limitations and silence, I saw unrolled before my eyes the first really new form of dramatic story-telling which had been invented for some five hundred years.

I saw, at last, a potential theater of the whole people: acted drama brought within the means of the poorest family, accessible all over the country, and beyond into foreign lands. It would be a new theater which the people themselves would control by sheer force of numbers, since dictatorship, while frequently controlling the intelligentsia in their patronage of the so-called "higher arts," has never

been able to influence popular drama. I had always followed the spoken drama as the democrat of all arts, but here was an art being born infinitely more democratic; an art which might soon cause spoken drama to be considered merely as aristocratic entertainment for the few who could afford it. .

Dimly, I began to see the screen's possibilities as a new social force, a new medium of broader appeal than any yet devised; a new way of revealing the peoples of the world to one another, not as Americans, Germans or Japanese, but as mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, lovers.

"We cannot hate those we understand," I thought, "and here is the most powerful method I have yet seen of encouraging international fraternity."

I had come and seen and been conquered. I began to look twenty years ahead and vaguely imagined the gorgeous spectacles, the intense dramas perfectly presented which then were only dreams, but which the next twenty years brought to life.

I should say, in fairness to the picture, that all these thoughts did not complete themselves while I was following the story on the screen. But they were direct results of what I felt and what I felt the audience feel.

As the picture ended, a buzz of excitement and applause told us that the battle had been won; the film was a smash hit and the Lasky Company was a successful, important force in the new world of the cinema.

My brother came toward me, wearing the other half of that same smile he had taken West. Only, this time, I was not feeling sorry for him; in fact, I was a bit emotional as I grasped his hand.

"Well, Bill," he drawled, "how do you feel about it now?

I had my eye on you, and you didn't once look as if you were falling asleep."

"Don't rub it in, lad," I said. "I'm only one of the wise men and you're Columbus; you've just shown me how to make an egg stand on end."

"Well, anyhow," said he, "you see what I meant."

"I see this," I replied: "you're the first man to use on the screen those basic principles of telling a dramatic story which we both learned in the theater; this is the first picture I've seen which dared treat what a man was thinking as drama without suddenly dissolving it in through the mantelpiece. I guess you saw farther than I did; this new kind of drama is going to go a long way."

"I think so myself," said C. B., "but what we need in the game now is a dramatist; a man like you who can help work out a new form of picture-story. I've only made one picture so far, but I've learned that we can't stay too close to the theater. Photographing a stage play 'as is' won't make a good picture, not once in a thousand times; we can't use words enough and besides, we waste the possibilities of the screen. The medium isn't right for regular stage scenes; we can't say it in words, we've got to say it with 'props,' with movement; we've got to photograph *thought*."

Suddenly, the whole matter became clear as his words showed me the barrier which had, up to now, existed between motion pictures and drama. Photographing thought: that was the answer; that would supply the essential dramatic element which pictures had not yet acquired.

"I get you, C.," I answered, "drama it not so much *what* a man does as *why* he does it; a man walking through a door is not necessarily dramatic, but if we know why he goes through and what he feels as he does so, the simple action may be the height of drama."

"That's the idea, exactly," C. B. replied. "And what we need is a new technic of story-telling which will follow the old dramatic principles, but adapt itself to a new medium; find its own compensations for its lack of words."

"And the keynote of that," I put in, "is to make a train of thought visible enough to be photographed."

"Which is not quite as easy as it sounds," he added, smiling, "unless, of course, we fall back upon an exaggerated pantomime, which destroys all reality."

"Looks like an interesting problem."

"I tell you, Bill," said C. B., "you'd love it out there. How about it—will you come?"

"I might get away for three months," I said dubiously; "then if I like it I could stay for a while."

"Okay," said C. B.

I wonder what my thoughts would have been at that moment had I realized that the "three months" were destined to prolong themselves into twenty years. But no such thought was in my mind when I broke the news to my startled family and shocked friends.

I had been writing and producing in the theater steadily for thirteen years, and had reached a point where nothing I wrote pleased me; I was ready for a change, and, having attained the ripe old age of thirty-six, I felt my youth departing and yearned for new adventures. My brother had become a complete Californian in six months, and now regarded New York with amused tolerance and all its inhabitants as weak, ineffective slaves of a dying civilization. If I wanted to be a man, I ought to go out there where men lived. I may have been influenced by not wanting to see his pity for me grow into contempt.

California seems to have that effect upon its citizens. As few of them were born there, they love the dear, old state

with a fierce passion which marks their pride in having chosen their own motherland instead of inheriting it as a by-product of birth. They feel personally responsible for all its natural advantages and take great pride in them: the fruit is indeed much bigger, but woe betide the man who dares suggest that it is also somewhat tasteless; the flowers are larger and brighter in hue, but the question of odor is passed by in polite silence; and the climate—ah! the climate! If you must make disparaging remarks about anything, make them about a man's mother, but let the climate alone.

The only things in the Golden State which its native sons admit are weak, trifling and of no account are the earthquakes. They do have the cunningest little earthquakes; you'd die laughing. They never do any harm and no one is ever hurt, unless some Easterner, through his own carelessness, steps under something which, anyone could see, happens to be falling down. Not at all like the Florida hurricanes, no sir! Now *there* you've got a really dangerous condition which makes it impossible to see why people go down to that place at all. Just taking their lives in their hands, twenty-four hours a day; but our little earthquakes—why, it's just as if Nature herself, feasting on all the state has to offer, had overeaten a trifle and had a tiny abdominal rumbling; the thing to do is simply to say, "Pardon *me*," and go right on.

Cecil, who never does anything half-heartedly, was already so full of the ancient lore of the Golden West that he spoke in familiar terms of covered wagons and the good old days of the Spaniards, and told me at length what to do on the desert when my water gave out. He alluded to the Atlantic as "a nice, little ocean," and turned on me with scorn when I remarked that the day was nice and sunny.

"Ha!" he snorted. "Call that little black ball up there a sun? Why, I can't see it without my glasses; wait, my boy —just wait till I get you out in California; then I'll show you a SUN."

His enthusiasm was infectious: I already began to feel myself part of a new game, citizen of a new state. Even the earnest advice of my friends had no effect on my spirits. They were only giving me the same arguments I myself had used on C. B. the year before. And I had seen the vision. Prices of theater seats were rising, which meant a slowly diminishing audience for drama; while pictures, as they developed, would reach more and more people. I was going to leave the theater in order to stay with the audience.

"When are you coming back to the theater?" my friends asked me.

"When the best seat on Broadway costs a dollar," I answered. I am still waiting for that happy day and so, I imagine, are several million others who love the living stage but are financially unable to patronize it.

Came the day, as we used to say on the screen, when I found myself actually aboard a train, pushing off alone into the unknown West. I felt so much like an old-time pioneer that I began to figure how many days' wagon travel the train covered each hour.

Like most New Yorkers, I had fallen into the habit of thinking that the United States was bounded by the Hudson, the East River, the Battery and the Bronx. For the first time, as I crossed the Central states, the Rockies, and then the plains and deserts of the West, I began to feel a sense of what our country really is. I began to feel the variety as well as the unity of our people. Dimly I began to feel the various types and contrasting interests of those who compose a motion-picture audience. The same picture

which attracts the Eastern shopgirl must also be vital to the woman of the plains, or of the mountains. The screen was accessible already to most of them; soon it would be within the reach of all: the girl who saddles her own cow-pony every morning must thrill to the same love story as the girl who every morning, drops her nickel in the subway.

I watched the changing scenes go by: cities, towns, villages, then scattered farms, and finally little settlements and ranches with miles of desert around them. So many kinds of people, each looking at life through the problems of his own environment; and our job was to find stories which would reach them all; an appeal to any special class of people no matter how large would still fail to reach enough people. What did they all have in common? Only their emotions. Their ideas on most matters were different, even their gods were different; but love, hate, fear, ambition—these were basically the same in all of them. It was to the elemental, then, that we must appeal; style and art were interesting but not essential; even in the theater art alone had never made a success of a play which failed to reach the emotions, nor had lack of art ever prevented the success of a play which had fundamental appeal in its story. How much more would this be true when we strove to reach millions instead of thousands.

It was my first realization of what a national audience was like. I had often used the term, academically, without knowing what it meant, but now I was seeing that audience with my own eyes; I was going to meet quite a lot of it; people quite different from those I had known. If they would talk to me they would teach me.

As I looked from the train window, I wove pseudo-dramatic stories about characters hanging around the stations. If a girl was good-looking in a big, buxom way, she

stood for the pioneer motherhood of the West, and I knew well the difficulties she had overcome; if she wasn't good-looking, she was still capable of great suffering and a noble, sacrificial death. The men, too, I endowed with much that would have amazed them. Six or seven years had dropped from my shoulders; I was young again.

All pioneers are young and it is heartening to recapture the poignant emotions of youth, the keen senses; yes, even the tastes and smells. And the dramatic arts are the happy hunting grounds of youth. When a man has grown old in his soul, the theater has little use for him, the screen even less. Drama wants the intense conviction, the positivism of youth, not the uncertainties of maturity; these may make good books, but on stage or screen they do not entertain; they irritate.

Suddenly I was in California. We had dropped down from the high altitudes of Arizona and were going through the Mojave Desert. Thrusting aside such book-learning as I possessed, I caught myself looking for caravans, and as we paused at a little water-tank station named Bagdad, I pictured Harun al Rashid and his ever-watchful vizier scouring the desert on pure white Arabian stallions. This may have been due to my first taste of the climate; few of us can jump from mediocrity to perfection within an hour and not feel a trifle dizzy. The sun was so beautifully bright that I risked my eyesight every time I tried to look out over the warm sands. And the sands *were* warm: about 135° in the shade, if you could find any shade. But what of it? I thought of the first men who blazed this trail, and sat back in my soaking garments to enjoy the next three hundred miles of God's country. The desert was really stunning and exciting, and even though I felt the heat at first, I was much helped by a kind Californian who pointed out

cooling patches of snow on mountain-tops not more than thirty miles away.

Luckily there is a great deal of desert. I took a considerable portion of it with me when I left the train; in fact, my clothes, eyes, throat, ears and hair could not have contained another grain of dust. The thousands of travelers who cross that desert every year would soon use it up had it been conceived on a less magnificent scale.

As I descended from the car and took my first step upon the soil of Los Angeles, I felt like saying: "Balboa, we are here."

Cecil was not at the station to greet me, but his lovely wife was there to do the honors. After a chaste family salute, she informed me that C. B. was out on the Lasky Ranch shooting "The Rose of the Rancho," and I was to put on old clothes and join him there without delay. I did.

Twenty miles north of Hollywood, the Lasky Ranch was several hundred acres of wilderness, leased by the Company for "location" shots. A "location" is any place outside the studio proper where pictures are to be made; even the front door of the studio itself, if shot from outside, is technically a "location."

I had never seen a motion-picture camera, nor had I the faintest idea of how pictures were made. I had not yet seen the inside of our own studio, but already I was feeling the thrill of the West—of adventure.

When I reached the scene of action I saw portions of an old Spanish hacienda built on the side of an uncultivated hill. A few yards away was a little modern ranch house where Frank Hopkins and family resided, but that was out of the picture. Frank was now superintendent of the ranch. Ex-cowboy and Cecil's right-hand man in all outdoor work, he could do anything with a horse, a lariat or a rifle.

As I drove up, Frank was talking to a solidly-built person, dressed in corduroy pants and puttees, a flannel shirt open at the neck, with dark sun-glasses, and a slouch hat pulled well down over his eyes. His clothes were wet with sweat and his face and arms caked with dust. After looking at him closely I discovered that he was my brother. He hadn't seen me yet and was giving earnest instructions to a group of rough-looking cowboys who also looked tired and dirty.

Under a clump of trees a group of actors, both male and female, were resting—the ladies with their silken dresses turned up above their hips to protect the costumes from desert dust; the men, coats off, trying to protect make-ups from melting in the heat.

In the center of my brother's group I saw my first motion-picture camera. As I did so, C. B. saw me. He broke his way out of the circle surrounding him and rushed over to me. The sun was getting lower and time was too valuable for formalities.

"Hello, Bill," he said, grasping my hand. "How's Mother? Here, put on one of those cowboy rigs and get on a horse—you're one of the attacking Gringos. The boys will show you what to do." He rushed away to give more instructions to his "Gringos."

With some misgivings, I started to climb into an ancient-looking costume. The period of the picture was about 1850, and I felt I was wearing clothes which had done service at that time and had not been cleaned since.

So this was the art of the motion picture! Well, anyhow, it was exciting.

CHAPTER III

COSTUMED, booted and spurred, I emerged from the canvas dressing tent and joined my fellow marauders. We were supposed to be a band of some thirty lawless, ruthless Americans who, taking advantage of the chaotic conditions following the annexation of California, were about to wrest by force this picturesque hacienda from the kind old Don and his lovely daughter and to add his property to the collection of the chief villain, who also, I regret to say, was an American, but doubtless with traces of alien blood.

A sweating property man took me in charge, girded me with cartridge belts, presented me with an old-fashioned Western revolver and introduced me to my horse, who eyed me suspiciously. I accepted the introduction with respect and a tentative gesture of friendship; I knew that my debut in motion pictures was largely dependent upon the character, skill and dramatic instinct of that horse. We exchanged one of those long, silent glances which are supposed to be typically Western, and I resolved to do nothing whatever to interfere with his cinematic career; where he went I would go too—I hoped.

A small, wiry, black-haired assistant director rushed up, said everything was ready for the shot and informally introduced me to "Milt" and "Tex," two rugged-looking cowpunchers, in whose hands he placed me. A whistle blew, and we all mounted and rode to a distant thicket of live oak from which we were to emerge in our attack. We sat our horses in the underbrush and waited for the dust to settle

so that the camera would disclose an undisturbed scene. We waited. The dust settled, a dry alkaline powder which coated us and laid a foundation through which rivulets of sweat worked their way.

Finally came the signal, a single shot fired by the director in person, dimly heard in the distance. Like bats out of Hell we emerged, the horses at full gallop, the men yelling and shooting. Of course, there was no sound recording in those days, but yelling seemed to help the actor-cowboys, and the shooting was quite visible to the camera. With Milt on one side of me and Tex on the other, we rode madly through gulleys, over rocks, through underbrush; the horses, excited by the mass movement, the shooting and the yelling, and, being picture-trained, heading right for the camera. Any obstacles in between were to be gone through or over; they never went around anything. A mighty cloud of dust enveloped and followed us. Any sense of hesitation I might have felt was checked by the sound of twenty horses pounding just behind me; my two guides on either side prevented any lateral movement; there was absolutely nowhere to go but forward. To fall in the midst of those tightly packed, racing hoofs would have been most unlucky. As we ripped through a patch of low scrub, I realized why cowboys wore leather pants and wished that my present costume had included them.

An apiary, half concealed among the low bushes, lay in our course; if added impetus to our speed was needed, the fact that we upset several hives supplied motive enough: you can't explain a thing to an angry bee.

In spite of the thrilling excitement of the charge, I found time for little snatches of prayer. Then I saw that we were nearing the camera. Up to this time such acting as I had done had been mostly involuntary and, I suspect, had not

carried that air of savage ferocity which the scene demanded. I determined to retrieve myself by doing my real acting close to the lens, where it would be effective. The moment was rapidly approaching and, because my attention had been devoted to staying on my horse, all my cartridges were intact. Guided by my infallible sense of showmanship, I held my fire until I felt I was right in the middle of the picture and close enough to be important. Then I began emitting lusty yells and firing my gun. When I had given what I considered an excellent performance, I noticed that I was alone; the others had checked their horses some distance back; I had put on my show just after the camera had stopped turning.

As I swung the steed around to join my comrades, I glanced rather sheepishly at the director, who was already among them giving instructions. Even though my acting had been a trifle late, I hoped that its quality might be appreciated. As he came up to me his sun-glasses hid the twinkle in his eye.

"Fine, Bill, fine," he remarked encouragingly, "but you're robbing posterity, old man: what you do after you pass that rock may be masterful, but it will never go screaming down the corridors of time. In terms of the stage, play your scene while the curtain is still up."

He turned back to the others. "Once more," he ordered.

So it was all to do over again. But I didn't care. The West was already beginning to get me: the wilderness all around, the rugged mountains on three sides of the valley in which we worked, the dry desert smell so different from the moist Eastern woods I was used to. It was great; I liked it. I had come out as a writer, and found myself elected to be a film cowboy; well, perhaps this training would put a spice of daring into my writing.

The second time we did the scene C. B. expressed himself as satisfied, and I made for the shade and a drink of tepid water from an earthen pot which was supposed to keep its contents cool by evaporation, but had only half learned the trick.

While my brother was busily engaged in setting new camera lines and rehearsing his actors for the next scene, I had a chance to take my first good look at him in action. His nine months in the West had certainly been good for him. He had bronzed and hardened, he was about twenty pounds heavier with not an ounce of fat. He seemed to glory in the excitement of the work—the dust, the dirt, the heat and general confusion. How on earth could a man think of dramatic values while he was putting forth such tremendous physical exertion? I learned later that he was just beginning to acquire the drama of mass movement, the ability to give dramatic point to what would otherwise be mere spectacle. He was, unconsciously, preparing himself for the Exodus in "The Ten Commandments," the crucifixion in "King of Kings" and the battle scenes of "The Crusades."

I noticed that C. B. and all his assistants wore leather puttees. They seemed most appropriate out on the desert, where tender love scenes are sometimes interrupted by the unexpected entrance of a scorpion, a centipede or a rattlesnake, and much of the vegetation is either thorny or poisonous. It was some time, however, before I got accustomed to puttees as standard garb for directing boudoir scenes or formal dinners on the stage. I suppose, at first, leather-clad legs gave us that sense of outdoor adventure which was so much a part of those early days. Then they became the essential part of a director's clothing, his badge of office, his insignia of rank. Even today many directors

cling to them while making pictures which never move off the enclosed stages and the sets of which represent the last word in affluent luxury. A director without puttees is like a British palace guard without his bearskin shako. To a rank outsider, it might seem as if this veneration of directorial puttees tended to emphasize the wrong end of the director, but we must realize that, like the rudimentary tail of man, they mark a bygone time when they were most useful.

Meanwhile I was watching C. B. plan the next scene and was trying to understand what he was doing. The technic of stage management was quite different from that of the theater. I began to see that in pictures depth was substituted for width; that in close scenes, where the characters were shown from the waist up, the width of the stage was only three or four feet and, while the actors might move toward the camera or away from it, they could not move across it without going out of the picture. It was like staging a scene to be looked at from the wings, instead of from the auditorium.

Much to my surprise, I began to recognize some of the actors as people I had not seen for years. Bessie Barriscale was there, an actress who had played in the very first dramatic piece I had ever written, which I had produced at Procter's 28th Street Theater some thirteen years before. There, too, were James Neill, an actor who had trouped with my father in the eighties; and his wife, Edythe Chapman, who had been my father's pupil at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, when it was first founded in 1884. And, crowning surprise of all, there was Billy Elmer, whom I had last known as a professional pugilist, when he taught me boxing at his gymnasium on 42nd Street. He was now a screen "bad man," and no skullduggery was too debased for him to do—on the screen. Forty-second Street

now seemed a million miles away, yet here were Billy and I, fellow artists, each learning a new profession.

"Hello, William," drawled a familiar voice, and I looked toward a quiet chap in riding pants, slouch hat, sun-glasses and a mass of blond, wavy hair. He turned out to be Wilfred Buckland, the Company's art director, who had designed all the scenery for "The Warrens of Virginia" when I had worked with Belasco, and was destined to be one of my closest friends in the many hectic years to follow.

"Why Wilfred," I exclaimed, "I didn't think any force in the world would pry you away from the theater."

"That's what I thought about you," he said. Then, waving his hand toward the plain and the mountains rising behind it, he added: "You see, this is the first time in my life I ever had a big enough stage to work on."

As I chatted with my old friends, C. B. came toward us bearing a carbine in his hand. "Here, Bill," he ordered, "you can shoot. Take this 30-30, go with Frank and shoot through this door. But don't shoot till you get the word."

"More blanks?" I asked, taking the gun.

"Blanks, Hell!" chirped C. B. "These are bullets, and each one of 'em will go through three or four men if you make a mistake."

"But listen, son," I said faintly, "I watched you rehearse this scene; there are a lot of actors in front of that door."

"They won't be there when you shoot," he said, and added grimly, "unless you miss your cue, or they do."

"But—why bullets?"

"Look," he said. "They're barricading the door; the Gringos are coming up the stairs; they pound on the door; it won't open, but we can see it shake. Then the Gringos start shooting through the door to break the locks; the camera will get the splintering door and catch the bullet

holes as they appear. That's why the cue is so important. One minute they're all in front of the door; the next, bullets are pouring through and it's being shot to pieces. Get the idea?"

I got the idea completely, though I didn't like it much. "But C.," I demurred, "I suppose you know what you're doing, but it looks damned dangerous to me."

"Dangerous!" he snorted. "Of course it's dangerous; who said it wasn't? But that's pictures. We don't fake anything in pictures; we've got to have the real thing."

"That's pictures," he had said: I wonder how many times during the next twenty years I was to hear those words, and use them myself. "That's pictures." This one short phrase lightly explains away the most unbelievable, the most bizarre happenings, which are just run-of-the-mill events in the strange world that is Hollywood.

C. B. was turning away when a thought struck him. "For God's sake be careful, Bill," he said earnestly. "I can only take the scene twice; we've only got two doors."

Impressed by the importance of my job, but with many misgivings, I joined Frank Hopkins at the bottom of a hole dug in the hillside to receive the top of the flight of steps up which the Gringos were supposed to be charging. When the door at the stairway's head was closed, we were effectually buried: little light, no air, but plenty of heat. We could barely see the spot on the door at which we were to shoot.

Frank instructed me to lie on the ground and shoot up at the door so that the bullets would miss the cameramen, who were in the most dangerous position of all, as they couldn't jump out of the way when the shooting began.

"That's fine," said I, "but suppose one of these bullets deflects—"

"Waal," said Frank thoughtfully, "I'm kinda hopin' it won't."

The scene finally got under way, and we waited, tense and nervous, for the whistle which would clear the doorway of actors and the second whistle which was our cue to shoot. The signal came, and our carbines barked as rapidly as we could pump shells into the chambers. Half-choked and half-blinded by the powder smoke in our confined quarters, I kept listening for the scream of a wounded actor. But none came. The whistle blew several short blasts to signify the scene's end. Our ammunition was exhausted, and so was I.

Wringing wet, I clambered out of the reeking hole to be met by the director, who was all smiles. "Fine, boys, fine!" he chuckled. "Jim Neill was a little slow in clearing and you only missed him by inches; the camera got it all—great stuff!"

I smiled feebly and headed for the water jar. I suppose if we had shot off one or two of Jim's fingers or any part of him that would show, the scene would have been just perfect.

It struck me then, as it has many times since, what chances picture-actors will take for the good of the picture. They go through fire-stuff, water-stuff, mad automobile rides, scenes with lions and tigers, pitched battles on horseback, dangerous falls, shipwrecks in the middle of February, desert-stuff in the middle of August, fierce he-man fights and numerous other perils, and take it all as part of the day's work. It does annoy them though, after they have risked life and limb to make a scene more effective, to sit in a theater and hear some bright young man explain to his girl that it is all a fake; that the falls are made by dummies and the animals put in by double exposure. In 1937, for

example, Charles Bickford got rather badly chewed up by a lion that was even more willing than Charlie to make the scene realistic.

Having drunk a gallon or so of lukewarm water, I returned to the set to find that C. B. had had another brilliant idea. This was to have one of the young actors on top of the wall raise a water jar over his head to throw down upon the attackers below. Just as the jar was about to be thrown, good old Frank Hopkins was to shatter it between the actor's hands with a bullet, and a 30-30 bullet at that. As I watched this scene taken and saw the jar shot from the young man's grasp, within a few inches of his head, I realized that I was still a tenderfoot. I couldn't have fired that shot with a high-powered rifle to save my life, but Frank did it as a matter of course. Even the actor, though somewhat white about the gills, acted as if nothing unusual had happened. He was within eight inches of sudden death, but as soon as the camera stopped turning he looked at the director and said, "How was it?"

It was fine, and the director was pleased as Punch. The sun was getting close to the mountain-tops and for twenty minutes the cameramen had been wailing: they couldn't shoot in the dark; of course, if the director wanted to spoil a lot of film that was his privilege, but they wouldn't be responsible; just the same they'd be the ones to be blamed for bad photography; they couldn't put a sign on the screen to say that the director had forced them to shoot in the middle of the night.

Hearing these mutterings and still feeling the rays of what seemed to me a bright sunlight, I turned to C. B. for an explanation.

"Don't listen to those chaps," he said, "they never have enough light. Some day they'll learn that soft lighting is

going to bring a new beauty to the screen, but at present they're not happy unless they can count the leaves on every tree in the picture. "You know," he went on, "I generally get my best shots about half an hour after the cameraman has given up all hope."

Nevertheless, he decided to stop for the day. He was tired but quite jubilant: a hard day's work on tricky stuff and nobody hurt. The ladies retired to the Hopkins house, where they slipped off their elaborate costumes and emerged in modern sport suits for the ride back to Hollywood. Everyone was gay and laughing as we packed ourselves into large open cars. They were through for the day; nothing to do until seven o'clock tomorrow morning.

I began to see that picture work had some advantages over the theater; these folks led a more normal, healthier life than they did on the stage. They did their work by daylight, much of it in the open, and lived at home with their families. As we rode along through the cooling air and a gorgeous sunset, we were like a bunch of youngsters going home from a picnic, tired but happy.

For a whole week we worked on the ranch, and I was given as many jobs to do as my brother's ingenious brain could devise: more riding, of course; a bit of hand-to-hand fighting on the stairway, and some shooting where the margin of safety was more than a few inches between my marksmanship and a man's life.

The strenuous, outdoor work and subtropical climate made it utterly impossible for me to keep awake after dinner, whether the affair was formal or not; no matter how important the guests might be, I found myself nodding even before the meal was over. Having heard of African sleeping sickness, and not being at all sure that a tsetse fly might not have joined the many other varieties which dur-

ing the week had developed a distinct taste for me, I began to worry until I was told that my symptoms were quite usual; that the climate made everyone sleepy for the first few weeks, but that its effect would wear off. It was a great joke, they said, to watch the poor Easterners trying to keep awake. I gathered that this was the only climate in the world with a definite sense of humor.

Our second week's work was in the studio, and the Director-General took great pride in personally conducting me over every inch of it. He explained the various departments and what they did, letting the idea gradually seep into my porous mind that although others might be larger, this was absolutely the best studio in Hollywood and probably in the world; that its technical force represented the cream of their various professions; that every picture it turned out marked a new era in the growing art, and somehow, indirectly, giving me the impression that he himself had not stood idly by while all these wonders were taking place.

So rapidly had the studio grown in the nine months of its existence that there were now two rows of dressing rooms, and another director, Oscar Apfel, whose function was to make all number two masterpieces.

Adjoining the end of the dressing rooms an office had been built for me. In construction it was exactly the same as the dressing rooms, except that it was double size. The idea may have been, in those practical days, that if my highly adventurous training as a picture-writer should unfortunately result in my sudden death, a simple partition down the middle of my office would provide the company with two more dressing rooms. Whether intentionally ironical or not, the scene of my future labors was set in the midst of a lemon grove. For the next year most of my waking hours

and some of my sleeping ones were spent in that little workroom with its plasterboard walls and tarred paper roof. Then, with the studio's further growth, I was moved to a new office supposedly far outside the active section of the plant; but two years later the studio caught up with me again, and once more I had to fly before the march of progress.

There must have been a great yearning for drama in the hearts of the public, to have forced such rapid and general development in the new medium designed to satisfy that want. From the very beginning, the public took charge of motion pictures. They created the demand and they supplied the money; not by buying stock certificates, but by buying theater tickets. The industry has never been healthier than when it financed itself from takings at the door. But one condition keeps it sound and will always keep it sound: there is no known method, no ballyhoo, no advertising campaign which will make the public buy any picture which it doesn't like of its own free will and accord.

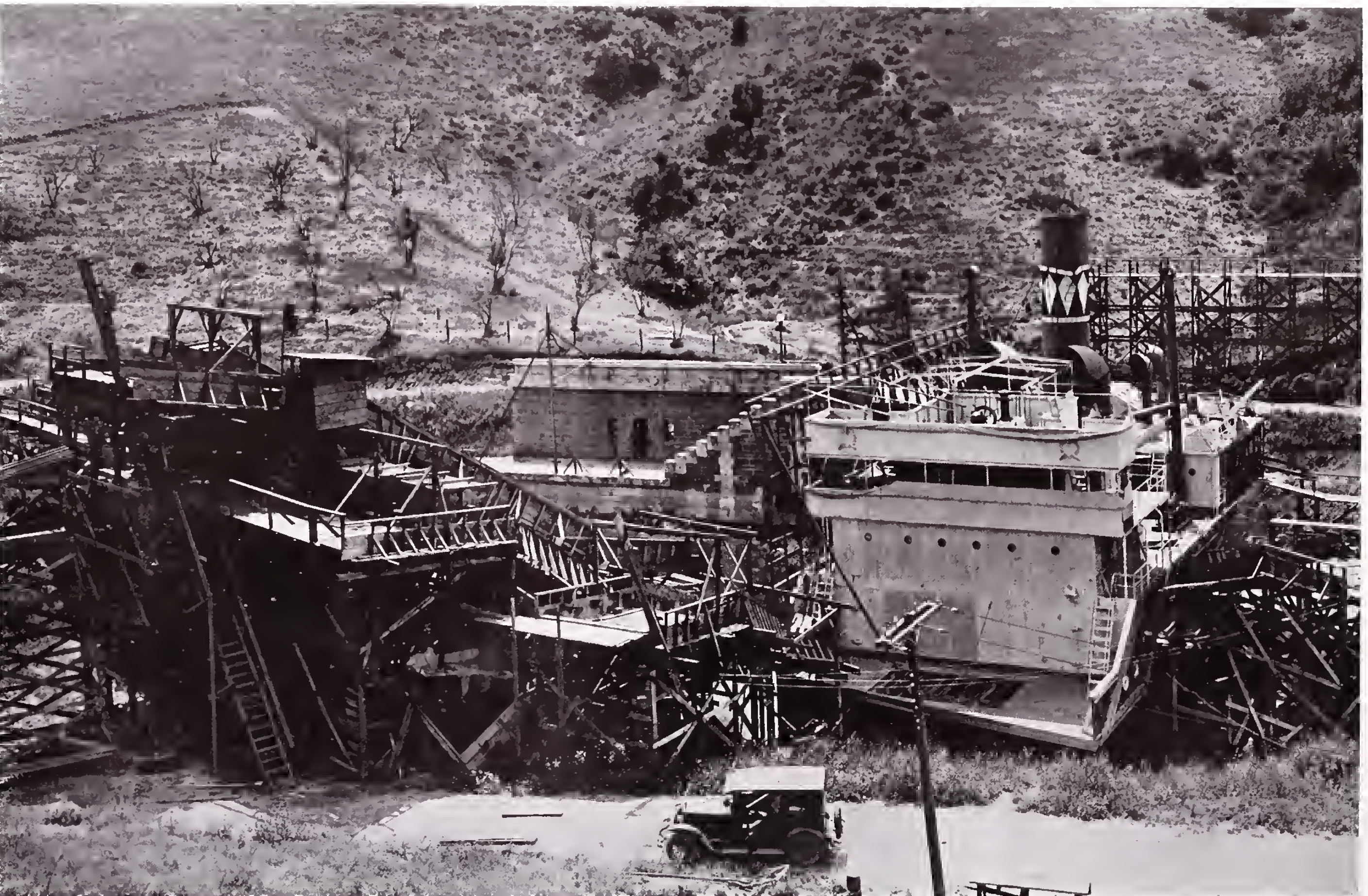
To those of us who have grown accustomed to the vast studios of today, with their tremendous plants and structures and their independence of weather, it is hard to remember the studios of 1914. We were not independent of weather. On our little outdoor stage, with no artificial lights, we depended entirely upon the sun. Whenever it went under a cloud work stopped, and we all rushed to the edge of the stage and regarded the heavens through smoked film. The experts would then predict how long it would be before the sun reappeared, and how long it would stay out before the next cloud hid it. A dark day meant a lost day, and at the first sign of rain there was always a great rush to get the set covered with huge tarpaulins before it was ruined. In cold weather many a day's work was spoiled

by "static," which was an electrical discharge inside the camera, caused by friction of the film as it went through the mechanism. This registered on the film as tiny lightning flashes and, as there was no way of telling whether we had static until the film was developed, we never knew at the end of a day's work whether or not it would have to be done all over again.

Another tribulation in cold weather was visible breath. The stage being no better than a large, canvas tent, there was no way of heating it. This was particularly hard on the women who had to work in low-cut evening gowns while the rest of us were wearing heavy sweaters. If the scene was one of ardent love in a luxurious drawing-room, it did not add to the illusion to have the lady covered with goose flesh and to see her teeth chatter as clouds of steam emerged from her mouth. The poor actors did their best; they almost burst trying to hold their breath throughout the scene while moving their lips in silence. To offset this, of course, there were the snow scenes done in summer under a broiling sun, with the actors wearing Arctic clothing; freezing to death at a temperature of a hundred and ten degrees. I remember one such scene where the players simply could not keep make-up on their faces; it melted off after each shot.

For the second week of my instruction I was given a script of the picture C. B. was shooting, and spent the time trying to connect scenes as he made them with what was written on paper. Gradually a light began to dawn, and I could see method in what looked like hopeless confusion; I began to "feel continuity," and to sense how these fragmentary incidents, when joined together in proper order, would tell a connected, cumulative story. I began to see how all the scenes we had made at the ranch would be interlocked with those we were making in the studio.

Francis X. Bushman and Neil Hamilton in "The Grip of the Yukon," shot on the stage at Universal Studio in the heat of summer, 1928.



A "ship-stage" at Universal City, built on rockers to attain realistic motion.

On Saturday night I met the Director-General "in conference." "Well, Bill," he said, "your vacation is over."

"What d'ye mean 'vacation'?" I responded. "I never worked so hard nor sweat so much in my life; I'm sore in every muscle, including my cerebellum."

"You don't tell me!" he said with brotherly concern. "I suppose what you've been doing does seem like work at first; as a matter of fact, you've been having a grand time watching *us* work while you were getting your education; but now you're educated."

"Oh, I am, eh?" I said. "I suppose if I'd been here four weeks instead of two I'd be an old master."

"Well," he smiled, "I could hardly expect my own brother to be less with four whole weeks to learn in. Anyhow, we have to move fast in this game; if we get behind, nobody's going to wait for us to catch up. Besides, you can't learn any more by watching; the only way to really learn pictures is to make 'em."

"Okay. How do I start?"

He indicated a manuscript lying on his desk. "Here's a script of the play 'Cameo Kirby'; Dusty's going to play it, and Oscar Apfel is the director. We're in a hurry for it, but because you're new at the game and this is your first script you can have two weeks to do the job."

I had seen my first camera a fortnight before; I had had a picture scenario to study for a week, and I was to write this in two weeks alone and unaided. But I was beginning to know something of the drive, the pressure, of a motion-picture studio.

I reached for the manuscript.

"Okay," I said.

CHAPTER IV

It is startling to realize that in 1914 the name Hollywood meant nothing whatever to the people of this country; even the picture fans hadn't heard of it. The larger companies had their studios, as I have said, in New York or Chicago; there was little or no picture publicity, no screen columns in newspapers, no reviews of new films. The general public was not yet studio-conscious. Even Charlie van Loan, the first writer, as far as I know, to catch the true spirit of the motion-picture studio and put it into fiction—even Van Loan had not yet written his delicious volume called "Buck Parvin and the Movies."

Certain actors, it is true, were developing a following, and several million people were familiar with names such as Mary Pickford, Pearl White, Henry B. Walthall, Mack Sennett, Francis X. Bushman and John Bunny; but none of these names had a national significance such as the screen star of today enjoys. In fact, the screen star, as such, had not yet become part of the scheme of things.

Hollywood in 1914 was a sleepy little town in which motion pictures had not yet become important, except as a possible menace to the peace and good name of its citizens. It lay on the outskirts of Los Angeles, which was itself a big, healthy, one-horse town of half a million people. Having grown in comparatively few years from little more than a trading post, the young municipality felt a poignant sense of rivalry with San Francisco, which would have re-

sulted in a magnificent battle for supremacy had San Francisco been aware of the competition.

Today, of course, Los Angeles stands completely victorious, in its own opinion, having more than doubled in size, due not only to immigration and fecundity, but also to its chronic habit of annexing all towns within twenty miles or so of the City Hall. It is quite possible, indeed, for a prospector, dying of thirst in the desert, as he thinks, to fall lifeless at the foot of a lamp post marked "Ocean View Avenue." San Francisco, meanwhile, has grown more slowly; it is content to be sophisticated and metropolitan; it has no desire to be both adolescent and universal.

At the time of my arrival, Hollywood was largely peopled by folks from Missouri and Iowa. Many of them had gone West to die, but had caught the spirit of the place before dissolution was accomplished and, wooed back to life by the omnipotent climate, had decided that dying in California was a discourteous act.

The town was a fairly recent real estate subdivision. At the turn of the century it had been ranch land seven miles outside Los Angeles, but now it was officially part of the city, and consisted almost entirely of cunning little bungalows and comfortably respectable two-story frame and stucco houses. To one who had become used to cliff-dwelling in New York, it was delightful to walk along sunny streets and feel that even the most unpretentious dwelling was a home; a home with plenty of light and fresh air, invariably surrounded by grass, trees and flowers. Most of these houses could be rented for the price of three dark New York rooms overlooking an airshaft, which in summer made it quite impossible to avoid being auditor and spectator of every emotional, personal and domestic problem which afflicted the neighbors.

Life moved here in a leisurely manner: no one was in a hurry; a semitropical languor pervaded the town, and you could easily identify an occasional visitor from the East by the way he passed all other pedestrians. The whole atmosphere was a welcome relief after New York, where everyone always seemed ten minutes late and the man on the street regarded all others as just so many annoying obstructions to his progress.

To the north rose primitive, desert mountains, unchanged for centuries; green in February and March, but burning a russet brown through the arid summer heat. A few steps outside the town and you were in desert country. Sitting in the patio of your home after dinner, you could hear the coyotes howl as they, too, felt the romance of the place.

Having always been an outdoor man, I responded immediately to the lure of these surroundings which made a perfect contrast to the hectic life of the studio. Less than six weeks after my arrival I had written my family to pull up stakes in the East and follow the setting sun until I stopped them in person. In order that they might not think I was acting precipitately, I explained that we were now Californians.

Good land in Hollywood sold at this time for about four hundred dollars an acre; ten years later, when Hollywood had become the motion-picture center of the world, this same land sold for more than a thousand dollars a front foot.

There were practically no shops and no restaurants; if I worked late at the studio and wanted to get a sandwich and cup of coffee on my way home, it could hardly be done after eight o'clock. There were two small drugstores about a mile apart on Hollywood Boulevard; these provided a simple luncheon service, but that was all over and done

with at half-past ten; after that you had to use the night bell. As I walked home at night along the Boulevard, dimly lit by widely separated, single electric bulbs of no particular power, it was quite unusual to see lights in any windows after ten or ten-thirty. By that hour the streets were deserted, and the sound of my footsteps on the concrete sidewalk made me feel uncomfortably conspicuous.

Hollywood "night life" was entirely limited to two small movie theaters whose second shows were over by half-past ten and which did not offer a picture every night. On Saturday evenings I took my wife and two little daughters to see a serial called "The Clutching Hand," an intermittent epic which left its heroine in such dire straits each week as to keep my offspring busy until the following Saturday figuring out how the persecuted young woman could possibly escape.

I observed then, as I have many times since, that children are neither frightened nor shocked by any scenes of human danger, carnage or general catastrophe. The sweet little things adore battle, murder and sudden death. They do not care for the supernatural and are adversely affected by bogies; love scenes bore them beyond measure and crimes of passion leave them politely neutral, as they are not quite sure with whom their sympathies lie; but throw men from battlements or pour burning oil on the enemy, and their delight knows no bounds.

I recall a scene in a fairly recent "Tarzan" picture in which Mrs. Tarzan was surrounded by twenty or thirty real lions, a few of which were preparing to spring upon her from the rocks above. The scene was done with such realism that I and other adults in the audience had a shrinking feeling in the pits of our stomachs, but two little boys and one little girl sitting just behind me were thoroughly

entertained. They were breathless with interest, and seemed to be a trifle disappointed when the lord of the jungle arrived, just in time, with several dozen elephants to effect a rescue; but the ensuing battle royal between lions, elephants and human beings put the children in good humor again. As far as I could gather from their brief comments, they wanted to see the lions fed, and, if no food was available except Mrs. Tarzan—well, they still wanted to see the lions fed. Watching these kids, I was reminded of that classic story of the little boy who wept over one hungry lion in the Roman arena because there were not enough Christians to go round. I, for one, believe that the story reveals fundamental child psychology. Certainly, looked at as physical suffering, nothing could be more elaborate than the punishment meted out to the Big Bad Wolf in "Three Little Pigs." I am inclined to think that, had the little pigs been human beings, childish sympathy would have gone infallibly to the wolf.

Those earnest citizens who are so eager to decide for the people what may or may not be shown upon the screen, should remember that the game "Cops and Robbers" was played by millions of American children many years before motion pictures, like the snake in Eden, introduced the first idea of evil to this hitherto blameless and immaculate land.

But in 1914 the screen was not yet important enough to make it worthy of being politically controlled. The professional reformer was already hot on its trail, but the politician, with his eyes as well as his ears to the ground, had not yet learned the screen's power to provoke thought in the masses. Once holders of public office had learned that the motion picture, with its vivid, emotional appeal, might stimulate new ideas among the people, drastic steps were

taken to throttle the voice of the infant art and prevent its being used to set forth any thought which was not completely endorsed by the various churches, the Constitution of the United States (except that part about free speech), the W. C. T. U. and the D. A. R. Public policy made it wiser to let sleeping dogmas lie.

Optimistic as we all were in those early days, none of us had the faintest conception of what would happen to Hollywood in as short a time as fifteen years. While the whole world became picture-conscious, Hollywood grew doubly so, as it developed into the acknowledged center of film production. The vast sums spent in making pictures were largely spent in Hollywood itself; the dimes, quarters and fifty-cent pieces of a wealthy nation were flowing in a mighty silver stream, which in those days could be exchanged for gold; flowing into this sleepy little town and intoxicating it. The place became a real estate dealer's paradise; land on the Boulevard sold for more than oil fields or gold mines.

Modern shops and hotels sprang up while your back was turned; tall office buildings arose to house hundreds of new enterprises which followed the growth of the studios and fed upon their people. Quiet, sedate Hollywood Boulevard cut down its beautiful palm trees and substituted tremendous lamp posts, set close together on both sides of the street. From these hung elaborate, brilliant lamps for which the taxpayers still foot the bills. A profusion of restaurants suddenly were there, some of them as expensive as the best New York had to offer.

As the country's attention was drawn to Hollywood and the star system developed in pictures, these restaurants became lures for tourists, who were arriving in vastly increasing numbers. Any eating place known to be patronized by

important picture people was sure to be crowded by sightseers. Those who couldn't afford the price, thronged the entrance and asked for autographs; others who couldn't afford the price paid it anyhow. It was something to remember all their lives that they had sat at the next table to their favorite hero and heroine and watched them consume their food; had even caught a few words of private conversation. It was thrilling to see him lean across the table and talk to her in that quiet, intense way; maybe he was making love! Oh Gee!

For the actors who frequent these fashionable places, it must be said that they endure this lack of privacy with amazing fortitude. Of course, it is good business for kings and queens to walk among the common people and be regally gracious. Also, if they didn't find some grain of personal satisfaction in the experience, they could eat at home or at one of the several luncheon clubs to which the general public is not admitted. Some, as a matter of fact, do.

One characteristic of Hollywood, which cannot fail to impress the visitor of today, is the high average of beauty in waitresses and shopgirls. This pleasant condition has been brought about by the fact that a large number of them are disappointed would-be actresses who left home towns for a screen career, plodded the weary rounds of casting offices until their money gave out and then had to take such employment as they could find. At one time the procession of unbidden young women to this land of promise was so great that social workers sought them out and tried to ship them home while there was still enough money for their fare. In most cases the determination of the novices was only equaled by their unfitness. I suppose it will always be one of Nature's unrevealed mysteries why every female of the human race thinks that she can act. If there were

only some way to make these poor victims of a mistaken ambition realize what a vast difference there is between ability to *feel* emotion and ability to *depict* it beautifully: in that difference lies the cause of thousands of Hollywood heartbreaks.

Nor is it easy for these young women to find other employment, for most employers have learned by experience that a screen-struck girl will drop her job like a hot potato at the first tinkle of a casting director's phone call. She will sacrifice weeks of effort spent in learning her new duties just to get two days' work as one of a crowd, in the vain hope that the director's eye will single her out and give her her long-sought chance. Today, those who are wise conceal their screen aspirations when looking for work in other lines. But one touch of the old Hollywood remains; the shopgirls and waitresses still call their female customers "dearie."

The two little picture theaters which originally satisfied Hollywood's cinematic desires were soon surpassed by several large, up-to-date palaces, the most characteristic of which was Grauman's Egyptian Theater, the last word in theatrical splendor for a short time, until it was, in turn, rendered obsolete by Grauman's Chinese Theater. For some years this house was a Mecca for tourists. The large sum of money it cost had been laid out to such good effect that the result of every dollar was visible. It was designed to remove any regrets its patrons might feel for having missed the Court of the late Kublai Khan. In the pavement of its impressive entrance-yard were set concrete blocks containing footprints and handprints of famous stars, from Mary Pickford down to Rin Tin Tin. This gave a fine effect of deathless age; it was almost like the Egyptian section of the Metropolitan Museum, with the added improvement that should one of

these celebrities be so unfortunate as to become an unwelcome memory, due to an occasional triumph of temperament over social custom, the stone record of his personality could be removed overnight and that of the latest favorite substituted in a simple but touching ceremony which made every tourist feel that he had been present while history was being made.

Grauman's Chinese Theater was the mother of the "première" (pronounced preemeer). This interesting custom started by being the opening of an important picture, and soon became the important opening of a picture. To be able to get seats for a Grauman première was a mark of distinction and a guarantee of professional standing. We paid five dollars apiece for them and were led to believe that this was only possible because of the high personal regard in which we were held by the management.

Premières have been attempted in New York, but they have never had quite the right flavor. For one thing, New York has never felt that on the night of a première the city's traffic must be stopped and the entire police department assigned to protecting stars from the affectionate pressure of their public. Then, too, a typical première audience could not be assembled in New York without paralyzing work at every studio in Hollywood.

On the night of a Grauman opening, huge studio arc lights around the theater threw their beams skyward—criss-crossing pillars of light which could be seen for miles around. All streets about the theater were roped off to keep the crowds more or less in place. People began to gather hours before the event in order to get places near the entrance where they could be close to the stars as they walked from automobile to foyer.

Sometimes pressure from the packed masses of humanity

was too great for ropes and police alike; the former broke and the latter were engulfed in a sea of eager fans, all good-natured but quite irresistible in numbers as they surged forward, pressed from behind by others who wanted more intimate glimpses of their favorites. When this happened, narrow lanes had to be opened up and celebrities shoved through as if they were carrying the ball and the theater's portals were goal posts.

On the night of Charlie Chaplin's première of "City Lights," which was held at one of the downtown theaters, the crowd was so great as to make it almost impossible for the audience to reach the theater at all. Automobiles were blocked in a single narrow line half a mile long, which police kept open with difficulty. All cars going to the première had official pasters stuck on their windshields to pass them through the lines; all other city traffic was diverted. As those cars containing the anointed crawled foot by foot through the jam, faces were pressed close to the windows on both sides, faces which showed excitement and eagerness to identify the car's occupants, and disappointment when the people in my car proved unfamiliar to the mob—almost resentment that personalities unseen on the screen should be allowed a place in this procession of immortals. The whole scene suggested a combination of the French Revolution with the procession of peers in "Iolanthe." On this occasion we abandoned our car blocks from the theater, and made our way on foot through side streets to the stage door. Once in our seats, we waited two hours until the audience had finally been able to enter; but the intervening time was put to good use by an operator with a searchlight, who played it upon various notables in turn, each of whom rose and "took a bow." Among these was Chaplin himself, who had as his guests Doctor and Mrs. Albert Einstein, then new to

this country. As the learned German rose to his feet, his uncontrolled silver hair a nimbus in the arc light, he showed the only signs of genuine embarrassment I had been able to see in the whole gigantic audience. He bowed modestly once and sat down, an excellent example of relativity.

Premières finally developed to a point at which the audience was more important than the picture, and no prominent star would think of being on time. They would wait until the house was full and then "make an entrance" down the center aisle, heralded by the voice of a loudspeaker booming their names. This was always preceded by a few words spoken from the lobby to the crowd on the street and to unseen radio listeners. These little talks invariably expressed the speaker's delight at being present, his utter astonishment at being asked to address the mike, his regret that all his hearers, both seen and unseen, could not be in the theater to witness this epoch-making event, a keen anticipation of the picture of which he had heard marvelous reports and a slightly emotional message of good will to producers and actors directly concerned.

Getting home from a première was almost as difficult as arriving, the crowd actually waiting through long hours to see its beloved heroes and heroines depart. If you were wise you told your driver to wait at a certain corner some distance away, and fought your way on foot to that spot. If it were a rainy night, it was just too bad; the crowd would still be there. I have never seen a night stormy enough to keep the faithful away; and when you finally connected with your car and reached your house it was almost time to start for the studio in the morning.

An attitude like this on the part of the public toward its entertainers must be founded on something much deeper than mere publicity or notoriety. Even the President of the

United States cannot hold a crowd of thousands waiting for hours just to see him leave his car and enter a theater. I believe that this mass demonstration of intense personal interest in picture-players shows a genuine affection toward those who stand before the people as symbols of romance, of high adventure, of self-sacrifice and ideals which we all have in our souls but seldom find opportunity to express with beauty and effectiveness. In its imagination, the public has identified the player with his rôles, and glorifies him as a superman. Therefore woe be unto the actor who betrays this trust and allows personal weakness to shatter the illusion with which public imagination has surrounded him. He will find the people turning against him overnight, not because they are fickle—quite the contrary—but because he has robbed them of a cherished belief, broken one of their idols and severed one of the links which bind them to beauty and romance. If the people were really fickle, they would not continue to applaud and support those actors, men and women, who have had to pass gracefully from the ardent rôles of youth to more mature "character parts" and finally to those of old age; they would not lay wreaths at the feet of Marie Dressler, Will Rogers, Theodore Roberts and the host of grand old troupers who kept their art and their personal integrity to the end.

The American nation today wants to make some form of drama a vital element in its life; witness more than fifteen thousand regularly organized private theatrical enterprises throughout the country. We are idealists and sentimentalists; priding ourselves on our materialism, we lose no opportunity to make a hero out of any possible candidate and endow him with every virtue most dear to us. So on stage or screen, drama pleases us as it expresses us to ourselves in heroic terms. Although he is not aware of it, every man

who buys a ticket is paying to be the hero of the story, just as every woman pays to be the heroine. Few plays or pictures succeed unless they contain one or two characters with which the spectators want to identify themselves. The actor who has transmitted to his audience this feeling of power, of superiority over circumstances, becomes himself a partner of the people in their secret, heroic lives; he has, for a moment, put aside the veil which separates what they seem to be from what they feel they could be, and they love him and are grateful. This is the real meaning of the première as a civic festival; this is why the première, for all its ballyhoo and circus trimmings, its mob psychology and its bad taste, becomes important as a gesture of appreciation made by thousands to those who have helped them find their dream-selves; a testament of the people to their love of the beautiful, the heroic, the romantic.

But conditions such as I have described were quite unthought of in the quiet little Hollywood of 1914. At that time the townspeople knew nothing of pictures or the personalities who made them; they had not the faintest idea that, within fifteen years, the name of their fair city was destined to become a household word over the whole civilized world; that Eskimos up in the Arctic and South Sea islanders in the tropics would be making pictures under the Hollywood label. Few of Hollywood's inhabitants had ever set foot in a motion-picture studio. They had formed their ideas of picture-making from seeing comedy companies enacting various kinds of chases through the streets and in the surrounding country. The general impression these experiences left with the citizens was that picture people, while amusing enough in action and at a safe distance, were hardly desirable members of the community and should, so far as possible, be kept shut up in their studios; a wild and

godless crew, quite capable of breaking the Sabbath with one hand while corrupting the young with the other.

Of course it must be admitted that the first picture pioneers to invade Hollywood were a fairly rough and ready lot. They did not always represent the best traditions of the theater; in fact, many of them had never been near a theater. Soldiers of fortune, cowpunchers, milkmen and vaudeville performers were among them; the game was young, eager and hungry for recruits who photographed well or were funny. Some of them were not notably good tenants and had been known on occasion to skip town, leaving the rent unpaid and the house in ruins.

These matters were brought sharply to my attention after my family arrived from the East and we set about finding a house for the four of us. My wife had discovered one she liked, and I went with her to pass approval and conclude the business arrangements. The house was owned by a nice homey-looking old lady who kept everything in apple-pie order and was evidently fond of her household goods. My wife and our two little angels of six and nine had evidently passed inspection and, at first glance, the landlady seemed to find nothing wrong about me. We agreed on terms, and everything was settled until she asked me what my business was. Unaware of any reason for concealment, I stated that I was in moving pictures.

The effect upon her of this simple remark was much the same as if I had invited a Brahmin high priest to eat pork with four untouchables. She clutched the lease tightly to her bosom, her eyes widening in horror. "A movie!" she gasped. "Oh dear! I didn't know that; I couldn't possibly rent my house to a movie."

I looked at my two innocent children and decided that for their sakes I must fight to prevent this stigma from

smirching their young lives. They were gazing open-mouthed at the scene, being at this time unaccustomed to seeing their proud but gentle father treated like an escaped murderer.

I inquired, very politely, just what there was about motion-picture people to put them so utterly beyond the pale. She explained at length and in detail; she had friends who had rented houses to movies with the most distressing results: everything which wasn't missing was broken; all the furniture and rugs were burnt full of cigarette holes, and the top of the piano looked like a series of advertisements of Ballantine's ale. Movies invariably kept dogs, she said, and while she didn't suppose even a movie dog smoked cigarettes, they had, nevertheless, their own equally effective methods of rendering furniture, rugs and curtains less valuable to an owner.

It took me fully half an hour to explain that, after all, I wasn't a *real* movie; that I was only a beginner who had not yet had time to learn their iniquitous ways. I recited a thoroughly expurgated history of my life, bearing down heavily on my years of work as a writer, a teacher and a college lecturer, and practically omitting to mention any connection with the theater. Finally I pointed to my two little girls as defense exhibits A and B. Did they look as if they smoked cigarettes or wrecked furniture in a sheer spirit of vandalism? Whereupon the two exhibits, with true dramatic instinct, contrived to look like two illustrations in the Book of Saints.

At long last the landlady softened, not because of my autobiography, not even on account of the excellent performances turned in by A and B. "Well," she said tremulously, "well, I suppose I'm making a mistake, but I'll take a chance on you because you've got honest eyes."

Samuel Goldwyn surrounded by studio cowboys.
Photographed by the author, 1915.

Wallace Reid and Geraldine Farrar in "Carmen."
Photographed in action by the author, 1915.

Anne Bauchens (R) on location at Catalina—The Buccaneer, 1937.
Photo by the author.

Wardrobe Mistress, The Buccaneer, 1937.
Photo by the author.

This tendency of the population of Los Angeles and Hollywood to regard all moving-picture people, without exception, as a band of irresponsible gypsies, did much to throw our colony upon its own resources, and gave us a certain esprit de corps which is bound to develop among members of an expeditionary force in a foreign land.

As individuals the citizens were gracious and charming, but they regarded their social organization with a deadly seriousness only equaled by that of a college secret society. Members of the older aristocracy were descended from the original Spanish owners of the soil or from hardy American pioneers of the fifties who had succeeded in acquiring title to a good part of the state in the days when a fair-sized ranch included a whole county. When the time came to subdivide these vast holdings of land, their children and grandchildren discovered that by selling a few square miles of the old homestead to be cut up into building lots, they could secure that freedom from the necessity to work which is the basis of all aristocracy. The large landholders of California were not the first to find out that an excellent way of being comfortable for life is to guess where the trend of population will flow, get there first, buy the land for a handful of beads, or take it from the Indians because they are foreigners, and then persuade succeeding generations to pay you for the privilege of using it. This interesting and generally accepted system puts the landlord somewhere between God and the people, but much closer to God.

The Angel City's newer aristocracy had acquired their royal purple through diligent attention to oil and beef, and were now eagerly promoting and absorbing all the culture which money could buy; after all, it is only a step from refinement of oil to refinement of taste. Having built their social structure on foundations as solid as real estate, oil-

fields and cattle ranches, they naturally viewed with alarm our group, with its filmy and highly inflammable background of celluloid. In particular, they felt nervous about their exclusive clubs; a great fear possessed them that they might wake up some morning and discover that during the night some person of the picture crowd had been made a member of their body. In order to protect themselves, their wives and children from such a catastrophe, it soon became an unwritten law that no individual of our profession was eligible for membership. They realized, they said, that among our numbers were several quite desirable people, but if one of these was elected he might bring a friend to the club, and then what? It was much better to make no exceptions; what a man was might be interesting but not important; it was what he *did* that counted. Looking over my own background, I realized that I was doomed to stand socially outside the golden gates of this lovely city. As far back as I could remember, whenever we had bought land we had always sold it at a loss; such oil as we possessed was just enough to fill our lamps, and while we had at one time owned a cow, we never killed her.

Of course, these social matters did not come to our attention all at once; on the contrary, soon after my arrival my brother and I with our wives were asked to dine at the most exclusive club by a charming lady who was one of the acknowledged leaders of local society. Busy though we were at the studio, we both felt it would be ungracious not to accept this gesture of hospitality and good will. Accordingly, we enjoyed a delightful dinner at which art, music and literature were the chief topics of discussion. When coffee was served our hostess wrenched the talk around to the movies; I say "wrenched" because up to that moment C. B. and I, having naturally low and suspicious minds,

had avoided all efforts to lead the conversation filmward, eluding the subject with the skill and grace of toreadors being charged by a bull. Unlike the bull, however, our hostess refused to be diverted by the waving of conversational red rags; with iron will and much charm of manner, she took command of the situation. Then it came out: one of the guests, an admiral or general or something, had, it seems, written a movie scenario. Did he happen to have it with him? By Jove! By great good luck he had forgotten to take it out of his evening clothes when he dressed for dinner. Well, wasn't that fine? Now that we happened to be together, he could take this chance to read it to us. Wouldn't we like that?

I am afraid that the next few minutes did nothing to enhance our social prestige. We explained as gently as possible that experience had taught us to deprive ourselves of such pleasures; that under the excitement and stimulation of such a marvelously good time as she had given us we couldn't apply the cold, pitiless logic which should accompany professional examination and analysis; that we always read new material in solitude, with prayer and fasting; and, on top of all this, it was getting late and we had to be on the job early in the morning. As we finally withdrew from the brilliant group I knew we were leaving behind us an impression that, while our table manners might pass muster, we were really not quite up to the more delicate niceties of social behavior.

But even though these trustees of the city's culture did not then, and as far as I know have not yet, admitted any motion-picture people to their clubs (except, of course, those country clubs which served as nuclei for real estate developments), they proved their broadmindedness in other ways. They never failed to call upon all members of the

profession for cooperation and financial support for various activities ranging from grand opera and the Hollywood Bowl down to club luncheons and private benefits. Whenever an appeal to the public was to be made, the movies were expected to furnish personal services and money. The very people who, as a class, it was feared would make their clubs less desirable, were in great demand to make their community affairs more attractive. And the "showfolks," following the tradition of their calling, gave and gave and gave, until they were run ragged. No public or quasi-public function was apt to succeed unless it could advertise screen personalities as bait; and when it came to benefits for charitable purposes, the movies were expected to put on practically the entire show. It became the custom of every committee giving a luncheon to telephone the studios asking what stars would be available as speakers to insure a good attendance.

For twenty years this attitude of "the best people" toward the personnel of the studios has remained essentially unchanged. It is the attitude of the two respected parents in that English ballad which describes how they lived virtuously in the country while their wayward daughter, in town, lost her name again and yet again. In the words of the song:

> "They drink the port wine that she sends them.
> But they never can forgive."

CHAPTER V

As I settled down in my little cardboard office to the work of making "Cameo Kirby," my first screen play, it became clear to me how different was this form of writing from any I had ever known. It seemed so simple, theoretically, to take a play, already beautifully written for the theater, and arrange it in a series of short scenes which the camera could photograph. I soon discovered that this method would not result in a motion picture; it resulted only in a long series of tedious conversations which could neither be heard nor understood. Without the language of the original work its detailed structure became valueless, and out of the whole play I was permitted to use only a few hundred words: a certain number of "spoken titles" which occasionally flashed upon the screen what the characters were saying, and a smaller number of "subtitles," or explanatory captions. I, who was fresh from the theater, found it difficult to think in terms of the camera, to write entirely for the eye and disregard the ear. I had already realized that what the screen ought to borrow from the stage was its sustained, climactic manner of telling a story; I had not understood that the fundamental difference of the medium made necessary an absolute change of technic in the way each story point was made clear. Robbed of language, I felt like a fish trying to swim without fins.

As I wrestled frantically with this new form of story construction, it became more and more evident that the idea was *not* to photograph a play; screen values are too different

from stage values. On the stage we look at the play through a telescope; on the screen we regard it through a microscope. This is true even today, when language has become an element of the screen play, but it was doubly true in the days of screen silence. Back in 1914 I began to see that the photoplay, as it developed, would first have to take what it needed from the theater: integral dramatic construction, psychology, sense of character—in short, verisimilitude; but that once it had acquired these sadly needed elements, it would grow within the lines of its own technic and draw further and further away from the theater. It would find its own dramatic craft, its own art of story-telling. This it has eventually done, but I fear my first script can hardly be regarded as a milestone. I plunged boldly into the new craft, not nearly as much afraid as I should have been had I known more about it.

The limited time which had been allowed for the job made night work necessary, and on one of these nights, working alone in the practically deserted studio, I had my first disillusioning experience with the movie type of Western he-man.

One of the cowboys, called "Red," had his living quarters in one of the dressing rooms. He slept there at night and acted as night watchman for that part of the plant. He and I had struck up quite a friendship, as I was eager for first-hand information about the romantic West, and he was only too glad to find a credulous listener. Being a tenderfoot, I was impressed by his rugged simplicity and saw in him a Bret Harte character come to life. He had given me instruction as to the best methods of "beating a man to the draw" with my revolver, shooting from the hip and various other manly tricks which hitherto had been known to me only in literature.

On this particular night I was engrossed in my work when I heard the pad of bare feet on the wooden runway between my office and the dressing rooms, followed by an excited knocking at my door.

"Come in!" I called, and the door burst open to admit Red, clad in his underclothes. He seemed frightened and, without his spurred boots, gay shirt, gun belt and ten-gallon hat, not nearly as impressive a figure as usual.

"Hello, Red," I said, "what's up?"

"I seen your light," he gasped, "an' I thought mebbe you'd come down to my room with me: there's a big tarant'la in there; he jest crawled out on the wall, an' I left before he could jump."

This looked like adventure. I had heard of the large tarantula of the Southwestern desert country, but had never met one face to face. This was my chance, and I looked around for a suitable weapon, finally selecting one of a pair of rubber-soled shoes and giving Red the other. I knew the black hairy monsters could leap eight or ten feet, and I was none too sure that my eye would be quick enough to intercept that leap with my trusty sneaker. As Red and I gingerly approached his quarters, I remembered the Tarantella my aunt used to play on the piano when I was a little boy, and wondered whether I should meet my death doing that wild dance which boyhood memory assured me was the inevitable result of this spider's bite.

"How big was he, Red?" I asked.

"Gosh! I d'no," said Red. "He was awful big; I was asleep an' I opened my eyes, an' that studio night light was shinin' on the wall an' here he come a-crawlin'. I didn' wait ter measure him."

I had read a story once, I think by Conan Doyle, of a great white spider, centuries old, which occupied a cave and

ate all investigators. I began to picture something of the sort as we arrived outside of Red's window and peered into the half-lit room. All seemed to be quiet on this western front; no great eyes glaring at us from the darkness, no huge form crouched for its spring—in fact, I was unable to see anything at all out of the way.

"He's hiding somewhere, Red," I said. "We'll have to have a light. The switch is by the door, isn't it?"

"Sure," said Red. He opened the door just enough to thrust in his arm and throw the switch. As the light came on Red jerked his arm out of the doorway and slammed the door. We resumed our vigil at the window and my eyes searched the floor for a hideous creeping shape.

Suddenly Red grasped my arm: "Thar he is, right where he was, over my piller."

I followed his pointing finger but could only see a small object which might have been a stain on the wall.

"But where's the big one?" I asked.

"That's him," said Red, "that's a tarant'la."

I opened the door and went boldly into the room. On the wall, fairly close to Red's pillow was a reddish spider whose body was no larger than a dime. He didn't look very dangerous; he seemed to be asleep. I had dealt with much bigger ones in my native Eastern woods. One quick tap of the sneaker and he became, in fact, a stain on the wall.

Red heaved a sigh of relief; although lacking all his regular accouterments, and dressed only in long-sleeved, long-legged woolen underclothes, he began to assume the professional Western manner again.

"O'course," he said, "I could of shot him, but I didn' want to make a hole in the wall."

"That's right, Red," I answered; "no matter what

chances we take, we've got to protect the Company's property."

With that I left him. It is possible that in the tricky half-light of the room, opening his eyes an hour or so after a more-than-probable snifter, he may have seen more spider than there was there. But I no longer sat at his feet to learn how strong, silent men of the West face the incessant perils of their rough life without a quiver.

It was during the working out of my first script that I became acquainted with one of the main foundations of screen illusion, the miniature. Of course, the miniature shots of 1914 were nothing like those of today, when the craft is so perfected that an expert can hardly tell a miniature shot from the real thing. In those days, scenes using miniatures marked the extent to which an audience would go in making believe they were seeing something real. We gave them the best we had in illusion, and it was good enough until someone discovered how to do it better; then the new method became standard.

"Cameo Kirby," being a tale of the Mississippi before the Civil War, naturally had to have a race between river steamers ending in a boiler explosion aboard the one on which our hero was traveling. The race and explosion were done in miniature, and these scenes intercut with those made on the stage showing our characters on deck and in their cabins. This series of scenes was designed to be the "picture-punch" or spectacular part of the film.

We created the Mississippi by building a long narrow tank of boards and tarpaulin. It was about forty feet long, six feet wide, and contained about a foot of water, which was kept in motion by paddles outside the camera lines. The property department had taken great pride in building two little side-wheel steamers about eighteen inches long, which

were moved by wires under water; their smokestacks belched forth what were supposed to look like terrific clouds of smoke, while lights showed in cabin windows and people could be seen indistinctly on deck: they had to be seen indistinctly since they were made of cardboard and stood not more than an inch high. On the far side of the tank hung a painted canvas drop showing the distant shore, again not too distinctly.

The camera traveled closely alongside the two boats as they moved down the tank, first one, then the other being ahead until they neared the end of the tank, when a property man pressed a button and a small charge of powder blew one of the boats to pieces. Seen on the screen, the illusion was not so bad except for one thing: there was no known way of controlling the tempo of the water or of the explosion itself. The waves of the mighty river had the quick lap-lap which betrayed it to be a very small body of water being artificially and violently agitated, while the effect of the explosion only lasted as long as it took the debris to rise three feet in the air and fall back into the water. Never was a steamer destroyed so completely in such a short space of time.

This was the main difficulty with all miniatures of that day which involved the time element. We knew what the trouble was, but were unable to correct it until the slow-motion camera was finally invented as the answer to a director's prayer. Probably no invention in the whole marvelous technical development of pictures during the last twenty years has done more to give reality to the screen than slow-motion photography; and like most of the other improvements, it came to fill a distinct and well-recognized need.

Today the quick ripples of our little tank are transformed

by the slow-motion camera into slowly heaving billows of the sea, while the explosion is magnified into the rending of great masses; the debris takes time to rise hundreds of feet and fall with mighty splashes into an ocean which looks miles deep. The problem of the miniature was solved when they found a way of magnifying time to the same degree that they magnified space.

That the audiences of 1914 accepted with such good grace our crude efforts at realistic illusion proves how willing the people always are to take any convention which they know to be necessary; the moment they know it is not an essential condition they refuse to accept it. All sorts of unrealities were forgiven in those early days, merely because it had never been possible to correct them. Daylight shone, unrebuked, through windows in the dead of night; moonlight was represented in various colors from deep orange to a bright and vivid blue; then an "improvement" was made by passing the film through two successive dyes, blue and amber. This process gave us a moonlight much more picturesque than anything Nature had been able to produce, but it had the disadvantage of making the characters look like disinterred corpses. Through all these different stages of development the public patiently awaited the really beautiful effects which modern craft can achieve; but as soon as a real improvement appeared the people instantly refused to accept anything less perfect. As improvements in technic began to come thick and fast it was inevitable that studio methods had to change almost overnight and a picture made in July was apt to be quite archaic by December.

When C. B. made "The Warrens of Virginia" late in 1914 the picture was complimented for being the first in which a director had been able to prevent the ever-present

sunlight from giving the lie to his interior night scenes; but the night outside was terribly dark, as it always is when black velvet is used as a back-drop. In this same picture he added a touch of realism by having the tripod of a field-telegraph system standing, deserted, on a battlefield; but, much to his disgust, many people thought it was a camera tripod, left there by accident. The public was so used to mistakes of this sort that they were merely amused, and not offended; all, that is, except the "comma-hounds," a group of people who got their sole enjoyment from pictures by discovering flaws and proclaiming them from the housetops. It gave them a great sense of superiority, but, to do them justice, it did help to make the studios meticulously careful.

Luckily for me the illusion of reality on the screen was still very much in its infancy when, in fear and trembling, I presented my first script for approval. Rather to my surprise, it was accepted with compliments although, as was the custom of the period, it was full of fairly long conversations whose meaning had to be deduced by the audience from the few short key-phrases which were flashed upon the screen. The accepted technic of that day was to cut the printed sentence right into the middle of the acted speech, so that when the audience had read it they could see the actor repeat the words they had just read. This gave a somewhat bizarre effect of the speech having been made twice, but it was some time before the technic of silent pictures was perfected in this respect. Years later it became the practice to reduce the number of words spoken by the actor to a point where the player would not mouth a single word which the audience could not understand. When this method was adopted, in the early twenties, pictures were written and acted largely in monosyllables and very short phrases, accompanied by pantomimic action which made

their meaning clear. As a corollary of this method, that part of the film which showed an actor speaking the printed words was cut out: the actor on the screen started his speech; then his words appeared before the audience and when the picture was resumed he was just finishing the last syllable.

This technical advance not only avoided the effect of repetition, but gave editors and censors a marvelous opportunity to change lines after the scene was shot. In fact, it was not at all unusual to change the whole plot after the picture was finished, still keeping the original action but giving it an entirely different meaning. Many an actor, attending the first showing of his picture, had the startling experience of seeing quite another story from the one he had played, and himself speaking lines he had never dreamed of when the scene was made. He saw himself enter upon his big moment and open his mouth to say, "So this is what I find: my wife in the arms of my trusted friend"; instead of which he found himself saying, "You look pale, my dear; is anything the matter?" And his wife, turning upon him with loathing and defiance in her face, seemed about to answer, "Can you blame me, when you yourself have been so unfaithful?" but instead replied simply, "A slight headache; it is nothing."

That action and facial expression did not quite harmonize with what the characters were saying was a minor point; a good film cutter, at this time, was supposed to be able to make a character speak any line which editorial genius had finally decided upon as the best policy. "Close cutting" effectively prevented the audience from lip-reading the wrong word, so if there was censorial objection to such a line as, "Take that brazen hussy out of my house," it was a simple matter to make it read: "I think the lady had better leave." Much of the bad acting on the screen which was criticized

with some severity during this period may be attributed to the fact that, in the final version of a picture, the actor frequently was entirely ignorant of the lines he was made to utter.

In the early days of my screen experience, actors were still talking their heads off, often improvising the lines as they went along. As the language they used was apt to be more forceful than polished, lip-readers in the audience received many a shock; so many, in fact, that it was soon found necessary to have directors take charge of all language which was not to appear on the screen and see that it would pass muster in polite society.

Even so, playing silent pictures vocally had one great disadvantage: the director and his actors as well were frequently fooled into thinking they had made a powerful scene merely because it seemed effective when they listened to it. Seen later on the screen in perfect silence, they were likely to discover that most of the strength had been vocal; that the scene had been played more for the ear than for the eye, and that, robbed of its sound, it looked like nothing but a lot of jabbering actors. It was because of this that many directors later had their actors play almost silently so they could estimate more correctly the scene's value as it would appear to the audience.

Music on the set was another great deceiver. Of course, the actors adored it; it helped them feel the mood of a scene even as it helped the director feel creative. It also eased the nerve-strain of long, unavoidable waits while lights were being set or details rehearsed. Then, when everything was ready for the camera, and the violin and piano, or the small group of strings started to play for the scene, a new, tense, dramatic atmosphere was instantly created. This was

fine as far as everybody's feelings were concerned; it was delightful to act and direct to soft music, but alas! when the scene finally appeared on the screen without accompaniment we found, only too often, that we had been feeling the music rather than the scene. Many a retake was made because the director thought he was getting an effect from his actors, instead of which he was getting it from his orchestra.

Actresses were particularly fond of music as an emotional stimulant, and many of them had favorite compositions which were guaranteed to bring results. I remember one beautiful young woman who associated a certain tune with the death of her mother. Whenever she had to weep she asked for that tune, which never failed to bring floods of tears. Another preferred a composition which, at the moment, was all tied up in her mind with an unhappy love affair. This tune, I found, although rather jazzy by nature, delivered its lacrimal goods even more quickly than did the maternal dirge. Later on, as a director, I always made it my business to discover the personal musical equation of my principal actresses. It saved lots of time.

In criticizing the obvious crudeness of the scenario itself during those early days, it must be remembered that we were slowly feeling our way into a technic of story-telling especially adapted to the new medium of pictures, which would tell the tale in visible movement with the use of as little reading as possible. Few, if any, trained story-tellers had put their minds to work on the screen as a definite and separate method of narrative or drama. Such story-technic as then existed was largely the result of trial and error, and had not driven any roots deep into structural principles of either the play or the novel. Attempts to do either were

likely to result in pictures which moved too slowly in story progression, or else were too close to theater form to make good use of those advantages peculiar to the screen.

Physical movement was confused with story action; the story frequently stood still while its characters were indulging in much unnecessary movement. If a scene, for instance, ended with a character saying, "I guess I'll go and see Jim," it would be followed by his exit from the room, a shot of him leaving his house and hurrying down the front steps, a shot of him hailing a cab and starting off in it, two or three shots of the cab dashing through traffic, turning corners on two wheels and narrowly avoiding other vehicles or pushcarts or pedestrians at the whim of the director, the cab finally arriving before Jim's house; then the dismissal of the driver, the running up Jim's front steps and ringing the bell, the door opening and, finally, Jim's room and the meeting of the two men. This was considered "action" in 1914; nobody noticed that through all this hurried movement the story itself stood still and did not progress an inch until the actual scene with Jim was under way; in short, that moving the characters was not necessarily moving the story.

As story-technic of the screen gradually developed and the principles of condensation and economy of action were discovered, we learned that we could tell a lot more story in a given time if we confined ourselves to essentials and left out superficial connecting scenes which could be suggested and taken for granted instead of shown. The talking picture has, of course, done much to develop new methods of succinct and vital narration, but long before the talkies we had reached a point where the character said, "I'd better see Jim," and, as he started to leave, the scene dissolved into Jim's room just as the men were meeting.

When "psychology" was first discovered as a possible element of screen drama, it was hailed as a great step forward, but unfortunately it was often supposed to be sufficiently revealed by a character standing in deep inscrutable thought before doing anything; the slower the movement the more psychological it was supposed to be. This phase of story development was ended by two things: a restlessness on the part of the audience and the advent of writers and directors who knew what the word meant.

We have become so used to the fabulous sums spent on modern pictures that it is hard to recall, with any sense of reality, those days when the best full-length feature pictures were not supposed to cost more than twenty thousand dollars. Even having lived through the era, it is not easy to imagine the motion-picture industry with no large salaries and no large expenditures. Such fortunes as had been made in the business had not gone to directors, writers or actors—not even to producers; they had accrued to those businessmen who formed the trust which held all important patents. The actual picture-makers had not yet been allowed a share of the "big money."

I remember well one night, shortly after my arrival, finding my brother and Jesse Lasky deeply engrossed in figuring out the year's probable profits. The Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company was by this time not only successful, but was well on its way toward being one of the industry's acknowledged leaders.

Jesse raised his eyes from the yellow pad, his pencil quivering excitedly. "Gosh, Cecil," he said, "do you know how much the Company ought to make this year?"

C. B. was sunk in the depths of an armchair, his evening pipe in his mouth, his putteed legs stretched out; dead tired after a day's shooting on "The Girl of the Golden West."

"How much?" he asked, laconically.

"Fifty thousand dollars," said Jesse, trying hard to keep a steady voice.

In spite of his fatigue the Director-General's eyes sparkled and a slow smile spread on each side of his pipe. "That sounds like success, all right," he remarked. "I guess we'll have to postpone that South Sea island trip."

"Boy," said Jesse, "when we take that trip we'll go in our own yacht and buy the whole island."

"And, meanwhile," purred C. B., "I can afford a new car."

Fifty thousand dollars! Approximately one hunded per cent profit on their capital! It was wealth undreamed of, and they felt, no doubt, as Midas felt during the early stages of his experience. And only a few years later I came upon these same two talking, rather nonchalantly, about a million-dollar profit on one picture which, in itself, had cost twice as much as the whole 1914 product.

But this growth, while due primarily to the public's love of pictures and unfailing support of every advance in art and craft, was not achieved without terrific labor on the part of the studios.

How we worked! Sixteen-hour days were the rule rather than the exception, and my diary tells me that during my first year at the studio I was away from the plant on only seventeen days, including Sundays. Somehow, we didn't mind it; there was so much to be done, so much to be discovered. The spirit of competition with the other studios drove us on. We all seemed to live under the tension of unceasing excitement; the plant was growing larger every day, the art and craft were improving and, best of all, the public was becoming picture-conscious. New theaters were

springing up all over the country and the national audience was doubling in size every year.

We thought pictures, ate pictures, dreamed pictures. No work was too hard to attempt; no sacrifice too great to make. One picture trod on the heels of another, and all had to be ready to meet their release dates. A call from the studio would take a bridegroom away from the altar, a mother from her children's Christmas tree, a winning golfer from the seventeenth hole. Our families knew us mostly by reputation, and no hostess expected us to be less than an hour late for dinner.

Every week we had an evening conference of writers and directors to discuss the technic of the moment and debate suggestions for improving it. Many rules of procedure were adopted, only to be abandoned a few weeks later for something we thought better. At one time we decided it was good practice to "iris out" the end of every scene, that is, to blacken the screen in a diminishing circle; and to "fade out" the end of an episode, which meant gradually dimming the whole picture to darkness.

One battle which raged for months was about the matter of "spoken titles": should they be used with or without quotation marks? The party of the Right held that they should be quoted, as they were printed quotations of the characters' words. The party of the Left argued that they represented the line actually being spoken, that they were not quoting anyone and should no more be put in quotation marks than the lines of a printed play. After a period in which either form was used at the discretion of the director, it became general usage to quote the lines in order to distinguish them from "subtitles," or explanatory captions as opposed to dialogue.

The subtitle itself had a most interesting growth. Inasmuch as the film-footage it consumed averaged about a foot for each word, it was customary to use as few words as possible in order not to rob the actual picture of length. Accordingly, captions like "Later," "That Night" and "Next Morning" were supposed to supply sufficient literary flavor, and had the great advantage of getting you quickly to where you were going. But even in its early gropings toward an art form, the motion picture began to feel that these short, staccato interruptions were not colorful enough. Directors and writers alike began to yearn for the poetic touch. "Later" became "Time drags itself along," which, in turn, became "Long, weary days have passed, full of the hopelessness of despair." "Next Morning" in its new "literary" raiment evolved into tenderly beautiful phrases such as "Came the dawn," or the more elaborate "Day creeps on apace."

As the general public seemed to find considerable emotional fodder in these frantic snatches at verbal beauty and power, title writers rose to greater and greater heights. Their chief difficulty was to find new ways of saying "Later" and "Next Day." Every picture made had to use several time-passing titles, and writers soon exhausted every known way of announcing the fact that hours or days or years had elapsed. They were driven to every subterfuge of which language is capable, trying to avoid the repetition of hackneyed expressions. Some slyly thought that the original short form could be concealed by combining it with other information, and we began to see titles like, "That night an important meeting was held at the palace," or "Next morning Tom has a surprise." While this method did seem to take the curse off the bare passage of time, it still left the title merely informative and quite lacking in

literary splendor. As a result, titles began to wallow deeper and deeper in the mire of "poetic" prose.

"Desire rears its ugly head" was too short to command much attention, but I remember one title of this school which filled the whole screen. It read: "Passion, that furious taskmaster, strikes without warning and leaves the mark of its lash livid across the Soul—" This was not the whole title; there was more to the effect that it may be only a woman's white arm against the black velvet of her dress which kindles the unholy fire which betrays friendship and leads to a wife's faithlessness. Oh, it was quite juicy, and, to embellish its effect, the words were projected against a background of living flames, just in case language alone proved too weak to express exactly how hot a passion was being described. This picture, incidentally, was very popular, which proves how far public taste in screen fare has advanced in a short fifteen years.

At this period simplicity was the last quality in the world which was thought to have any value in language on the screen. The subtitle had to be either poetic, philosophical or humorous while conveying its necessary information, and at last reached a point where so many words were screened in the course of a picture that some films began to look like brief photographic flashes between miles of printed matter.

Reaction at once set in and the wordy subtitle became unfashionable. In its place appeared the symbolic-pictorial method of showing that time flies. Our old friend, "Two Years Later," after having passed through every possible stage of verbal grandeur, became a picture of an unknown hand tearing leaves from a highly legible calendar, while other elapsed periods might be indicated by beautiful Nature-shots of spring changing into winter and back to spring again; a clock marking the eighth hour which dissolved into

the same clock at midnight, or with hands which quickly revolved before our eyes. This was, at least, a return to true picture methods after the silent screen had indulged in its orgy of words, but again writers and directors were driven to the verge of madness in finding new devices to show elapsed time. Seasons, clocks, watches, calendars, all have been used in a hundred forms, and any studio worker today who can find a new way of saying "Later" deserves an Olympic wreath.

Subtitles could be very devilish, at times, in carrying unknown and unwanted double meanings. I remember one in which Ramon Novarro, playing a South Sea islander, was making his escape with the lovely native heroine. The only chance to get away lay in their descent of a frightfully dangerous path which ran down the side of a terrifically high waterfall. The girl recoiled in horror at the prospect, and Ramon, picking her up in his arms, started the almost impossible task of carrying her down. As he began his perilous journey, the scene faded out and into the subtitle, "Down the Virgin Falls."

By the time the audience had read this, it was far too late to explain that "falls" was meant to be a noun.

CHAPTER VI

As THE importance of story value and story construction began to be realized, it was inevitable that a conflict of authority should develop between writer and director. This battle, which really began in 1914, was waged for many years with varying results, according to the relative strength and resistive powers of the individuals involved; in fact, it may still be said to exist, as the year 1938 saw a major engagement between organized screen writers and producers, the writers demanding more authority over their own work.

It must be remembered that at first the screen-writer, as such, was unknown. The director had sole charge of the picture; the author, if any, was supposed to supply him with the outline of a story, which the director would then change, adapt and construct, supplying all details, both of incident and character, as his own taste and creative power dictated.

One of the oldest, most sacred traditions in the motion-picture world is the strange belief that authority over a work of art suddenly and miraculously confers artistic ability and perception upon whoever is lucky enough to be in charge. Even today modern executives are usually ready and eager to order specific changes in a picture against the opinions of high-priced directors who have proven their worth and expensive writers who are supposed to know their business.

The old-time director, who was really creating the picture, had even more reason to believe his story sense infal-

lible. He worked in the days when there were no supervisors, and when children and nephews of producers were still too young to assume executive positions. Then, too, there were no trained writers working in the studios. It was the director's picture, and he was God. It was quite natural therefore that, when we began to organize a scenario department, directors tended to balk when told to follow the script as written and that any changes therein had to have an okay from the department, whose head was entirely responsible for the story as screened. Many directors felt that their professional rights were being infringed, and to some extent they were justified, as few of those experienced writers who now began to join the studio knew much about the screen or could appreciate the practical problems which directors had to overcome.

One of the older directors, who was frequently alluded to as the dean of his profession, used to say that his method was to read the book or short story which he was to screen and, as he read, to dictate notes to his stenographer. When he had finished reading the story he had finished his scenario. He shot his picture entirely from his dictated notes, but, of course, changed the story as he went along and saw values which his first reading had failed to disclose or which had been entirely missed by the original author. This manner of making pictures undoubtedly had its advantages as a timesaver, but unfortunately it was based on the theory that the director's genius as a dramatic writer was superlative, a theory which in many cases proved to be far from the truth.

It was to a director of this school that one of my young writers once bore the final scenes of a script. The girl had done what I thought was an excellent piece of work, and

had devised much effective "business" for the scenes, which she had written in considerable detail.

The director was new to our studio and to our methods of screen-writing; he read the manuscript with lowering brow, and as he reached the end he exploded.

"Look here," he yelled at the frightened young woman, "what's the idea of putting in all this business? I'm the director and nobody can tell me what my actors will do. You're supposed to be writing the story, not directing the movement. When it comes to the end you just write 'Lovers' Meeting, Fadeout'; the rest is up to me."

This was a point of view which had to be overcome before real screen-writing could be developed, but even today the screen-writer has been, as a rule, unable to attain anything like the position of authority which the dramatist holds in the theater.

One reason for this is that, in its relation to the finished work, the manuscript of a picture cannot be as complete in itself as the manuscript of a play. So much of a picture's value depends upon the director's work: the varying distance of the camera from the players; the angle at which the scene is shot; the picture composition; camera emphasis, which accentuates the essential dramatic point of each moment, and camera movement by which the lens becomes a mobile, all-seeing eye from which the character cannot escape—all these elements which are part of the director's job make him, perforce, more of a collaborator in the way the story is told than is the stage director, who can move only his actors and not his audience.

Knowing little of these values, and being fresh from the theater, I naturally began to work for the long, sustained scene as against the short, choppy, jerky scene which was

the usual technic. I thus got into endless battles with various directors who refused to change their styles at my request and broke up my nice long scenes into a multiplicity of short ones. So annoyed was I at what I considered their high-handed methods that when we made "The Goose Girl," in which dainty little Marguerite Clark was the star, I refused to have my name on the screen because my scenario had not been strictly followed. Nor did it soothe my ruffled feelings that "The Goose Girl" promptly turned out to be one of the Company's biggest successes of the year.

I realize now that I was mistaken in not seeing the dynamic value of the quick-cutting method which gave the picture pace and excitement. Of course, pictures of this period *were* too jerky, but the long, uncut scene was not the answer. The film seemed to move by jerks because it was cut in a way that interrupted the thought; the scene didn't flow smoothly because frequently the cut was not psychologically prepared. It was an arbitrary shifting of the focus of attention, instead of leading the thought ahead of the cut and then going to where the audience already wanted to be. The problem was solved when we learned to shoot the scene so that the film could be cut without cutting the thought; so completely solved, in fact, that later in a well-cut scene the audience never saw the cuts; they followed the action as it progressed and felt that they were seeing one uninterrupted scene, quite unconscious that it was really composed of twenty or thirty separate shots.

Problems such as these were discussed by me with C. B. as I lunched with him every day in his private dining room, which differed from the dressing rooms only in having a partition and a stove. It was our daily chance to compare notes and plan changes in our own technic, as well as analyze the work of our competitors and decide which of their

improvements would fit into our scheme of things. C. B. was almost, if not quite, the first director on the West coast to use artificial lights, and I remember well his joy and pride in developing what he fondly and optimistically called "Rembrandt lighting," which, in its early stages, consisted of brilliantly illuminating one side of a character and leaving the other side invisible.

In a game which moved as rapidly and hectically as motion pictures were then moving, every improvement in the craft, even though based upon a perfectly good idea, was bound to be manhandled and misapplied by rivals eagerly awaiting the chance to steal one another's stuff. Thus, when D. W. Griffith began to use his soft-focus lens to give added beauty or mystery to a shot and the idea was hailed as an advance in art, we had an era of fuzzy pictures which I am afraid did more to irritate the fans than to charm them. If a cameraman didn't have a real soft-focus lens, he merely threw his regular lens a bit out of focus and felt artistic for the rest of that day. And when the Germans began using "unusual" angles, generally with a definite, psychological purpose, we kissed the idea on both cheeks and indulged in an orgy of "unusual" angles, generally with no psychological or dramatic purpose whatever, but just to keep ahead of the procession. Love scenes were shot from the ceiling, giving an excellent view of the tops of both lovers' heads; mirror-shots, always the directors' darlings, became so rampant that the audience frequently had trouble in untangling the scene from its reflection; cameras were placed on the floor, whence the full depth and beauty of the heroine's nostrils could be viewed; cameras were placed behind bureaus, so that as the heroine pulled out the drawer we could peek up at her just as if we were actually in the drawer, a rare and most artistic viewpoint.

Meanwhile my scenario department had been growing even faster than most things grow in California. When I first started work, so careful was the Company in matters of expenditure that I was not allowed to have a stenographer. There was already one in the plant who did all the work: typing business letters for the Director-General and the studio manager; taking such dictation as I had to give on departmental affairs and, in her spare moments, copying all manuscripts for the directors' use. She was more than adequate, but there was only one of her and it soon became evident that even my one-man department could use a secretary's full time to good advantage.

When I approached C. B. with the idea, he immediately ceased being a brother and became an executive.

"For God's sake, Bill," he barked, "what do you think this is—the United States mint?"

"Calm yourself, son," I rejoined. "I merely thought that, as time is the most expensive commodity we use in pictures, I might save some of it if I didn't have to wait for Gladys to finish a full day's work for you before she could tackle mine."

His look became almost plaintive. "Here I lie awake nights trying to figure how to make pictures without spending any money and you come along and want a secretary. I suppose you could work better yet if you had a little black boy to sharpen your pencils and a beautiful blonde to tear the pages off your pads."

"No doubt I could," I replied with dignity. "But I, too, have been lying awake nights trying to figure how I can turn out a script every two or three weeks with a secretary who is always busy when I want her and always tired when I get her."

He frowned thoughtfully. "Have you anyone in mind?"

"Yes. I want to send for Anne Bauchens; she's been my secretary for years, and knows—"

"But she's in New York," he interrupted. "Are you, by any chance, having a vision of the Company paying her way out here?"

"No, lad, no," I soothed. "Even in my maddest moments I couldn't conceive of a wild phantasy like that. I will transport the lady if the Company will pay her salary."

"How much?" asked the Director-General.

"She's crazy to get out here," I said. "I believe she'd come for ten bucks a week to start with."

"Forty a month," said the executive, and that was that.

So my well-trusted secretary of other days was the first official addition to my department. She is now one of the best film editors in Hollywood.

During the year that followed, as the studio expanded, I had added several more writers to the department: Margaret Turnbull, who had collaborated with me in writing "Classmates"; then her brother Hector, who wrote "The Cheat"; and by the end of the year, we had six or eight writers regularly employed, besides various readers, secretaries and stenographers. Times had changed since my modest demand for a secretary had shaken the studio to its foundations.

But I was getting mental indigestion from consuming too many stories. Right from the start we faced the greatest problem with which the motion-picture business has to deal; a problem which has grown harder and harder to solve as the years have passed, and today causes even more sleepless nights in Hollywood than the vast number which the tabloids attribute to romance: the problem of story material.

There was at that time no "Producers' Code" to compel observance of ethical principles in the business; honor, hon-

esty and fair play were entirely optional, a condition which finally made the code an absolute necessity. There was no Hays office to protect the originator of an idea from having two other fellows beat him to the screen with it. If we used one of the classics or any other material in the public domain, some rival would be almost certain to make a quick, cheap version of it and cash in on our advance publicity. And as the industry was soon to need six or seven hundred stories a year, it was not long before it became hard to find good modern stories or plays suitable for pictures.

As the scarcity of material began to be apparent, we made the fatal mistake of letting it be known that we would read and consider all manuscripts sent us, no matter by whom written. There must be, we thought, many unknown geniuses hidden in the midst of our vast population: young Shakespeares and Kiplings and Mark Twains whom the cruel lash of necessity has prevented from expressing their God-given talents. This will be the opportunity of the forgotten author; the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company will strike life's shackles from his writing hand and open the door through which he can reach fame and fortune.

Came the deluge.

Manuscripts poured in on every subject under the sun and several more besides. They were written in English, near-English and non-English; they betrayed a comprehensive but imperfect memory of every story which had already been screened. Many of them were autobiographical. These had no plot whatever, the authors seeming to believe that because certain commonplace occurrences had actually happened to them, the mere truth of the event gave it a rare, dramatic interest. Some cautious ones wanted to sell us their life stories for a fixed sum, but refused to reveal any details until they had been paid. A few of the

scripts had apparently been written by authors of some ability but had evidently been rejected by other producers. The potential Shakespeares, Kiplings and Mark Twains, if they did exist among the proletariat, gave no sign of their presence.

It was necessary to employ a number of readers to reject the obviously useless and pass on to me anything which looked as if it had even the germ of a usable idea. In the course of that year my department read over ten thousand scripts from unknown authors. Of these my readers handed up a mere dozen as possibilities. I selected four as having a chance of interesting development. We finally bought two, of which we produced one; and that proved to be a complete, almost a sensational flop.

After this experience we, as well as most other picture companies, began to turn a deaf ear to yammerings at the gate. We decided then, and the decision holds good today, that even if we found an occasional gem among the thousands of unsolicited scripts which continued to come in, it cost far too much in time, money and effort to separate one sheep from so many thousand goats.

That is why, today, an unknown author has little or no chance of having his work read by any studio. If he wants to write for the movies, he must first prove that he *can* write by having his story published in some form. Pictures, today, are so expensive that a producer prefers material which has already proved to have audience value. If the studio does use an original story, it must, at least, be written by an author who is known to have the power of pleasing audiences. Screen rights of successful plays bring the tremendous prices they do not only because the play has been well advertised, but because the story itself has already been endorsed by a large public. This is the best kind of insur-

ance for a producer who expects to spend half a million dollars in making a picture of it.

"The year of the great flood," as we began to call that period when studio doors were open to amateur writers, taught me how utterly impossible it is to judge a story by a reader's synopsis. Unless the reader is himself a writer of talent, it is useless to expect that he can reveal in a few pages those qualities which may be the whole secret of a story's power and charm.

Stripped down to bare plot, one story is much like another in its group. After all, there are only thirty-nine basic dramatic situations, and those qualities of treatment, of character, of color which make one "Boy-Meets-Girl" story quite different from another are almost sure to be missing in a synopsis. Today this problem is solved, to some extent, by greatly enlarged story departments, more expert and more expensive readers, and the growing custom of telling the story to the producer by someone who tries to bring out its picture values. This gives him a much better idea of a story's possibilities than an unimaginative, factual condensation written by a girl who gets twenty dollars a week for the job.

Another important reason why studios are no longer cordial to uninvited manuscripts is the constant danger of suits for plagiarism. It seems quite impossible to convince the unknown author that producers do not read original stories with the sole purpose of stealing their ideas. This, of course, is not a new point of view on the part of the amateur writer; it has long existed in the theater, as I am in a position to know. Hardly a successful play is produced which is not attacked by some unknown writer who claims that it has been taken from a brainchild of his own. In some cases the un-

known author is sincere; in many more it is a racket, the plaintiff hoping to be bought off without going to court.

In my own stage experience I was accused of stealing almost every successful play I ever wrote, although the whole world seemed to agree that all my failures were mine alone.

When Belasco produced my play, "The Woman," in 1911, we were haled into court by a little East-side barber named Abraham Goldknopf, who claimed I had stolen it from an important but unproduced sociological drama of his called "Tainted Philanthropy." This was the more remarkable in that two more dissimilar plays never existed, and Belasco, who had suffered much from plagiarism suits in the past, was quick to seize this golden opportunity of complete vindication. As "The Woman" was then running, he produced Mr. Goldknopf's play for the court's benefit and the judge sat all day in the Belasco Theater, seeing "The Woman" in the morning, and "Tainted Philanthropy" in the afternoon.

After the court had handed down its verdict, which said, in effect, that it saw nothing at all alike in the two plays and was rather at a loss to know how the plaintiff could. Goldknopf, eager for a moral victory at least, buttonholed me as we were leaving the courtroom.

"Mr. deMille," he said earnestly, "I haf been told by experts dot my blay iss much better dan yours."

"Mr. Goldknopf," I replied wearily, "at no time have I denied the superiority of your play; all I denied was its similarity."

He probably still feels that there is no justice for an obscure author against the money and corruption which are tools of the successful.

On another occasion I had written a little one-act skit

called "In 1999," which was played for years all over the country by Joseph Jefferson, the younger, with Florence Nash and Minette Barrett. Incidentally, this was my first production for Jesse L. Lasky, who was then a vaudeville producer. For this sketch there were seven separate claimants, each of the seven being positive that he and he alone could have conceived the idea. Only two of them sued me, however, the others dropping out when competition grew so intense.

It is interesting to note that these submerged authors never seem to have anything of their own produced. If we are to believe them, they have supplied the ideas for every successful play or picture which has reached the public, and yet these great ideas never see the light of day in the form in which they were originally cast. In an unstolen condition they seem to be quite unmarketable; only after being acquired illegally do they take on beauty, power and commercial value. The unknown author lives in a strange, mad world where unsuccessful writers originate all ideas of real value while successful authors depend for their material entirely upon the brains of the failures.

Motion-picture companies, being much larger than individuals, make ideal targets for alleged authors who try to make an honest living by establishing a nuisance value. Every producer thoroughly realizes that it would be utterly bad business for him to steal material and jeopardize a picture which cost a small fortune in order to save the comparatively small sum for which he could buy the picture rights. As a matter of common practice, studios leave no stone unturned in clearing the title to every story they use. They prefer published material because of the protection its copyright gives them, and if an author has died everyone who might inherit any rights in the work is painstak-

ingly sought out and dealt with. If the book or play has been published in foreign countries, it often takes years to arrange a clear title for world rights. An expensive production depends upon Europe for a large part of its profits, and no company will invest the vast amount necessary unless it feels quite secure in its ownership of the story.

In spite of all this, companies are constantly being sued either for plagiarism or for the unauthorized use of material; their legal departments are always busy, either in court or out of it, dealing with the claims of these nuisance-value authors.

This condition has led to a new form of attack in the cases of pictures which use as characters well-known personalities of the past. Ever since a British court decided that the picture "Rasputin" had, without authority, used the character—although under another name—of a Russian court lady, and awarded the lady a sum which must have been a great help to any political refugee, the woods have been full of people whose feelings have been hurt by what the screen has done to poor Great-Grandpa, or dear Great-Uncle George. Judging by the amount of damages demanded, the world has entered a new era, in which everyone, in order to escape acute mental anguish, must never be given cause to doubt the absolute perfection of any of his ancestors. But the complainants are not unreasonable; for a hundred thousand dollars in cash they will suffer in silence, agree to forgive and forget and let Great-Grandpa's reputation take its chance with posterity.

So troublesome has this situation become that producers live in terror whenever they use modern historical figures. If they make a picture about Benedict Arnold which indicates that, at one time, Benedict was not one hundred per cent loyal to the American cause, some descendant of the

Arnold family is sure to turn up with charges that the work libels his much misunderstood kinsman and makes life impossible for himself, his wife and his innocent children. He then flies to the courts for relief.

Even the Bible is not immune to suits for plagiarism, as my brother discovered when he produced "The King of Kings." C. B. wanted to make this picture his monument. He realized his responsibility in attempting to put the New Testament on the screen, and approached his task with reverence and great care. His research had been most painstaking in order that nothing should get into the work which was not authorized by at least one of the Gospels. The progression of events followed the story as told by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If ever material was safe from predatory attack, we fondly imagined this to be. But we were mistaken.

There was in Hollywood at this time an actress who had once been quite famous in the Follies, her fame being based more on body than on soul; in fact, she was known for the elemental force of her language, which in private conversation depended for emphasis upon short words, largely of Anglo-Saxon derivation.

This lady, it seems, during those intervals when she was not displaying her many charms to eager audiences in the Music Hall, had become deeply interested in the New Testament; so much so, indeed, that she had made her own arrangement of its contents. By some strange coincidence, her arrangement was exactly the same as that of "The King of Kings," and the injured arranger brought suit for heavy damages; not, however, until two and one-half million dollars had been invested in the film. The suit was not successful, but it did prove the point that even material two thou-

sand years old does not deter the much-wronged, unknown author from crying "Stop thief."

Way back in the early days, as American pictures began to be popular in Europe and South America, we discovered still another pitfall yawning at our feet: the nationality of our villains. No solution has yet been found for this difficulty. If our villain is a Chinese, we soon hear from the State Department that the film is highly offensive to our friends in China, and that unless something is done about it the Company will find its entire product barred from the Chinese market and even the director will be unable to show any future work there.

The same problem exists with respect to Mexico and the South American countries, as well as to all the nations of Europe; no country will tolerate for a moment the idea that one of its nationals may not be the soul of honor, dignity and courage.

In the beginning, motion pictures were not considered important enough to worry about and we could pick our bad men with impunity from any race. Those were the happy days of cruel Mexican bandits in Western films. Today the Mexican bandit has to be a patriot who has been deeply wronged and has taken to banditry as the only way to achieve certain highly ethical results. Even then he must have a lovable personality, and it helps the feeling of international friendship no end if his sweetheart can be ravished by outcast Americans. One disadvantage of a world market and huge audiences is that there are so many toes to step on.

During the War, of course, it was easy; we had Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria, any one of which could supply enough villains to meet the demands of the whole picture industry. But with the resumption of diplomatic

relations, the characters, as shown on the screen, of all evil citizens of these countries took a sudden turn to the right. From a Hollywood point of view there were two great losers when the Treaty of Versailles was finally signed: Germany, who lost all her colonies; and Hollywood, who lost every nation in which villains could safely be shown to have been born.

One possibility remained: Russia. Our government had not yet recognized the Soviet Union as legitimate, and although Hollywood bore Russia no particular grudge, some of our greatest American producers having been born there, we were driven by stern necessity: we had to have villains, and there was that tremendous land, far too busy to protest and containing one hundred and sixty million potential menaces. As soon as Hollywood realized these possibilities it gave a vast sigh of relief, and for some years most of the dirty work on the screen was assigned to men and women of Slavic blood.

With the diplomatic recognition of Russia, however, Hollywood's last source of evil-doers was eliminated by one stroke of the presidential pen. Today the screen villain is a man without a country; his name is ambiguous and gives no clue to his nationality; he hates the Stars and Stripes but, alas, he has no flag to which he dares owe allegiance; if he speaks with an accent it must not suggest that his native tongue is any which is known to man; if he wears a uniform it must be different from any uniform which exists; if, in the last reel, he is finally deported as an undesirable alien, the boat which bears him forth just sails out into the ocean —we never know its destination.

As an example of what can happen we have only to remember "Scarface," a gangster picture of recent vintage.

After the film was finished it was discovered, to the horror of all concerned, that various details of the story implied that the main character might have been of Italian parentage. As it would never do to let the public think that anyone connected with New York's underworld had ever even heard of Italy, the picture had to be largely remade, adding tremendously to its cost, and from the final version we may conclude that all its reprehensible characters were born on the high seas under a pirate flag and never did succeed in finding out what country their parents came from—if any.

As the matter stands today I can see only one solution to this vexing problem: let a syndicate be formed to purchase an island upon which an independent state may be founded. This state may be either a monarchy or a republic, but it must have no connection with any other race or nation. It could be called "Villainova," and its government could support all the inhabitants in luxury and without taxes, simply by charging a fee to allow picture companies to make all their unpleasant characters Villainovians. It would be essential, of course, not to permit motion pictures on the island, but the general ease and comfort of their lives should compensate the population for that one drawback. At any rate, no one's feelings would be hurt and the great horde of evil men and women who are so necessary to screen plots would once again have a flag to wave, a country to remember and some place to go if by chance they reformed.

Of course it had not escaped our attention that we could show American villains without any danger of being the spark which would set off the next World War. We tried it and sometimes still try it, but in doing so we ran into a new and unexpected set of difficulties which revealed the fact that our own people are just as sensitive to an implied na-

tional villainy as is every foreign country. American audiences much prefer to see foreigners do whatever has to be done of a disreputable nature. Our system of education has taught us that Americans are the wisest, kindest, most honorable, most chivalrous and by far the most courageous race the world has ever seen. Any medium of expression as popular as the screen must be careful not to flout our national self-satisfaction. If it does, there is a price to pay.

If we do screw our courage to the sticking point and show an evil American, we meet not only a general feeling of disapproval on the ground of national pride, but we encounter howls of rage from that particular group with which our delinquent citizen may be associated. If we show a doctor doing anything unethical we soon discover that we have mortally offended the whole medical profession, and hear from them in great numbers to the effect that for base, mercenary and unpatriotic motives we have libeled a noble, self-sacrificing calling, whose every member is above suspicion. If the necessity of our story demands a crooked lawyer, the Bar Association is not only broken-hearted but truculent. As for the Church, it has long been an established rule that no member of the Cloth may err upon the screen; I think this rule was put into effect about the time of the Hall-Mills murder trial.

Policemen, of course, must always be a credit to the force; there must be no hint of graft or corruption which might involve the department, and I was much surprised when the Retail Druggists Association did not enter formal protest against the apothecary scene in "Romeo and Juliet."

Under circumstances like these, the way of the screen-author is not an easy one. Evil-doers we must have, but they cannot be members of any country, any race, any profession or any trade.

Motion pictures, for some years, have labored under the imposed condition that, as far as our social and political institutions are concerned, whatever is, is right; a theory which, as Charles Dickens once observed, would be most comforting if it did not also mean that nothing which ever has been, was wrong.

CHAPTER VII

The growing success of Lasky feature pictures in those early days created a demand which soon outgrew the studio's capacity, although the plant was constantly being enlarged. In 1915 the public had already shown that it liked longer pictures and was turning from the one- and two-reel product of the Trust to that of those daring independents who were braving powerful opposition in order to follow their own ideas of what the people wanted. The Company began to make what it then considered good profits, but the money came directly from the people, not from bankers, and most of it had to be spent to satisfy an ever-increasing need of greater facilities, larger personnel and better and more expensive production. "Bigger and better pictures" began to be the annual promise of every chief executive, the constant effort of every man and woman in the studios.

Making "bigger" films was entirely a matter of ready cash, but making them "better" meant finding the right brains and training them in a new craft, of which even its leading experts knew very little. It was largely a case of the blind leading the blind and, as vision came in small degrees, the led frequently became the leaders. Improvement in quality was not so hard to attain at first; there was nowhere to go but up, but as pictures gradually did get really better, progress naturally became slower. The public was always a step or two ahead of the producers; they could assimilate better technic faster than the studios were able

to achieve it. "More good directors" was the cry then as it is now; "more good writers" was a call which started with feature pictures and grew so insistent that, during the last twenty years, it has at one time or another drawn to the studios practically every dramatic author in this country as well as in England.

It was easy enough to call for more good directors, but not at all easy to find them. Motion-picture direction seems to demand a mixture of qualities as rare as that which makes a good dramatist: a combination of scientific craft, creative artistry and great sensitivity to emotional and dramatic values. The stage, for years, has been screaming for more good dramatists but developing very few; and the stage, in its present incarnation, is more than five hundred years old, with its general principles, artistic standards and technical craft standing solidly upon long experience; a very different state of affairs from that which faced the pioneer moviemakers.

Necessity for more product so far outgrew available manpower that in 1915 my brother actually directed thirteen feature films, including two with Victor Moore, three with Geraldine Farrar, and one with Fanny Ward and the Japanese actor, Sessue Hayakawa. This last was "The Cheat," a picture which was the talk of the year and which was later made into a play and then into a grand opera.

C. B. had intended to make only twelve personally directed pictures that year, feeling that if he attempted more than one every month the artistic quality of his work might suffer. But just as he was about to begin shooting "The Cheat" we had "director trouble" with another picture called "The Golden Chance," which was due to start at the same time. No adequate director was available and the picture had to go before the camera at once or miss its release

date, a catastrophe which would have hurt the Company financially as well as in prestige.

There was only one thing to be done, and C. B. with his usual audacity determined to do it. In spite of the fact that "The Cheat" was one of the heaviest productions he had yet attempted, he decided to take over "The Golden Chance" company and direct both pictures at once, with two entirely separate production units. This he did by shooting "The Cheat" by day and "The Golden Chance" by night; a feat quite unique in motion-picture history and one which, by all the laws of nature and the movies, should have reduced him in a week to a gibbering idiot. As far as I was able to observe, however, no such result occurred. He finished both pictures on time and both were outstanding hits of that year. The only way I have ever been able to explain his amazing durability is that as a substitute for sleep, during a whole month, he must have found mental rest and nerve relaxation in the thought that he was doing something which no other director, even partially sane, would have attempted.

Those were the days when directors and writers adapted themselves quickly to changing circumstances, using whatever the gods provided, feeling free to avail themselves of unexpected opportunities, even accidents, if they made interesting material. Many a good effect was secured which was quite unintended; a fall from a horse or the capsizing of a boat, if utilized on the spot and followed through, might easily give an added thrill to a scene which had been planned quite differently.

An example of using the unexpected occurred when I was writing a script for C. B. called "We Can't Have Everything," based on a novel by Rupert Hughes. The cast included names well known to picture-lovers of the period:

Tom Forman, Wanda Hawley, Raymond Hatton and dear old Theodore Roberts. It was the story of a young woman who in the pursuit of happiness and wealth becomes a movie actress to attain her ambition. Everything depends for her upon the success of her first picture but, when the film is only half completed, the studio burns down, leaving her penniless, jobless and desperate.

In considering this situation I remembered that our executive office in New York had recently been most emphatic about the cost of our pictures. It was necessary, they said, to improve the quality but we must figure out how to do it for less money. This cry, by the way, has continued to echo down the years ever since; New York always thinks that Hollywood spends too much on its pictures, and Hollywood has never changed its opinion that New York doesn't understand the problem. In this case, however, I saw a fine chance to be "the fair-haired boy" and save the Company money. Full of this idea and tingling with commercial virtue, I sought the Director-General for consultation. I found him scowling at the cost sheets of his latest picture and knew the time was ripe for my suggestion.

"Come in, Bill, come in," he said as I entered. "Maybe *you* can tell me how to show luxury, beautiful exotic gowns and elaborate sets without paying anything for them."

"New York been howling again?" I asked.

His eye wandered to a Western Union message of several pages lying on his desk. "I don't know why they trouble to send wires," he said rather sadly. "I think, on a quiet night, I could hear them with the naked ear and save all the expense of telegraphing."

"Well, cheer up, son," I said brightly. "I'm about to save you a lot of money on your next picture."

He looked at me suspiciously. "Well now isn't that per-

fectly grand?" His voice held a slightly bitter note. "Everybody is telling me just how to save money on production; the only trouble is that if I took the advice there wouldn't be a damn thing in my pictures anybody would want to see."

"The most expensive pictures are not always the best," I said impressively.

"Neither are the cheapest," he snapped.

As I could think of no telling rejoinder I found it wiser to come to Hecuba: "I want to talk to you about that fire stuff in 'We Can't Have Everything.' "

His eye brightened: "Sure, that's good stuff; how do you want to handle it?"

"I don't; I want to cut it out."

"Any particular reason?" he asked acidly. "Or does it just make you too warm to write it?"

"Fire stuff is too expensive, C." I urged. "It's all right for Rupert to burn down his studio in a novel—that doesn't cost anything; but in pictures it costs like hell."

His eye focused once more upon the voluminous telegram from New York. "But don't we need the fire stuff for story purposes?" he asked plaintively.

"That's just the point," I cried triumphantly. "We don't. I've analyzed it. All the fire does is to put the Company out of business; it hasn't any other real story value. We can just have the Company fail financially, which does exactly the same thing to the plot and saves us an awful lot of heavy expense."

He brooded. "You may be right from a story standpoint," he said at last, "but, somehow, to me, a blazing studio with lots of people running around and plenty of physical danger for our heroine is a lot more interesting, on the screen, than the sight of business ledgers full of red ink."

"I know," I said, "but there's lots of good picture stuff in this opera; it's going to cost the limit as it is and we simply can't afford a fire."

He finally agreed, for, be it remembered, this was still in the days when producers were making pictures largely with their own money, before the public was allowed to have the vicarious thrill of participating in Hollywood activities through the purchase of common stocks. And C. B. would not have believed me if I had told him that within ten years he was destined to spend two and one-half million dollars on a single picture.

I wrote the script as agreed, without the fire. Then, about a month later, when C. B. was shooting the story and was "on location" for the day, I was busy in my office when I heard much commotion outside, accompanied by the dreaded sound of the studio fire alarm. I rushed out into the yard and found the stage and an adjacent building burning like tinder, with the whole studio force trying to get the fire under control. As quickly as I could find them I dragged three camera men out of the ranks of fire-fighters and issued orders: "You boys grab your machines and shoot this fire from every angle you can think of. Give me long shots, close-ups, fade-ins and fade-outs. Get the fire department when it arrives, and feature the man with the hose. One of you get on the roof of the laboratory and get the fire from there. Hurry up or they'll have the damn thing out and it'll be wasted."

The boys got right on the job, but the fire was stubborn and before it was put out half the studio had gone up in beautiful black smoke and flame which photographed like a million dollars. As soon as the blaze was extinguished I went back to my office, which luckily was not in the burned section, and began a hurried reconstruction of the script.

That night when C. B., hot and dusty, returned to the plant, I met him at the gate with a dozen sheets of new manuscript.

"Half the studio is gone, C.," I greeted him, "but you get your fire stuff; I've got about three thousand feet of the loveliest fire you ever saw, and I left word that nothing was to be tidied up until you'd seen it. Your long shots are all taken and you can do your close-ups tomorrow. Here's the script."

After looking over the ruins he turned to me with a rather rueful smile. "I always felt we needed that fire-stuff, Bill," he said, "but you were quite right—it's damned expensive."

As long as we were able to use the fire as an important "production highlight" it hurt our feelings not at all that within twenty minutes of the time word had been flashed that the Lasky studio was burning, two comedy companies, from rival firms, appeared on the street outside where they each proceeded to shoot an extemporaneous one-reel comedy using our fire as a background. Professional courtesy has never risen to greater heights.

In 1915, Mr. Adolph Zukor with his Famous Players in the East, and the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company in the West were the two outstanding leaders who were entirely committed to feature pictures. They could see no future except in longer films, which would supplant one- and two-reel subjects and become the life-blood of the whole industry. It seems amazing that, in the face of definite public approval which already had risen to the point of insistent demand for longer pictures, old companies such as Biograph and General Film still felt that fifteen to twenty-five minutes was the longest space of time during which a motion-picture audience could devote its attention to one

Theodore Roberts in "Grumpy," 1923.

The author's daughter, Agnes, aged 10, playing the part of Blanche Sweet as a child in William deMille's first production, "The Ragamuffin," 1915.

The "great" strike scene in "The Ragamuffin," 1915. Blanche Sweet standing at left; Marjorie Daw next to her.

story. They felt that the demand for feature pictures was a fad and would soon die out.

But the continued success of longer films brought in its wake a new condition which was destined to have revolutionary effects upon the whole motion-picture business. This was the growing importance of stars. The public was beginning to demonstrate that it would pay vast sums to see its favorites, and had shown conclusively that stage names were not necessarily good attractions on the screen.

Mr. Zukor had discovered that his slogan, "Famous Players in Famous Plays," did not express the will of the People. They insisted upon making their own favorites famous, and reputations made in the theater were practically unknown to that vast general public which was rapidly becoming a distinct, mandatory force in shaping this new form of drama which, the people realized, was their very own to an extent that no other kind of drama had ever been. Previous success on the stage was no handicap, mind you, but it counted for very little; every stage actor who appeared on the screen had to start again from scratch, and make his own way in competition with the field.

Not many of the theater's famous sons and daughters were able to attain an equally important place in the affections of the picture public. At various times many were called by the producers, but few indeed were chosen by the millions of judges who decide the fate of every candidate for screen honors. Robbed of their voices, and seen for the first time in that almost indecent intimacy which is the method of screencraft, players from the stage found their personalities changed. In many cases their vocal art had been the basis of their success; without it they were lost. A badly-shaped nose could undo a lifetime of hard work; unlovely teeth could render a fine talent useless; a skinny

neck, and the lady was sunk. George Arliss was one who was able to transfer both his art and his personality intact to the screen, so far as the silent picture could express them; Nazimova was accepted as the great artist she is, but insisted on feeding her public caviar, for which they had no taste; but Ina Claire, Ethel Barrymore, DeWolf Hopper, even those old favorites, Weber and Fields, found their personalities discounted by the new medium. Youth and beauty was the demand, and beauty was likely to mean the corn-fed rotundities of adolescence, so adored by the multitude, rather than that vital quality which intelligence alone can give.

Once aware of this situation, and being a showman of rare vision, Zukor decided to dominate the field by collecting in his fold those personalities which the public had already elected to stardom. By far the most valuable star at this time was Mary Pickford, and Zukor had her under contract; she was the nucleus around which he built his whole program, the saying at the time being, "He can sell his whole block of pictures by hanging them around Mary's neck."

Mary, of course, was the ideal picture star. In addition to having beauty which appealed to all ages, sexes and races, she had a camera-proof face; it was impossible to find an angle from which she looked unattractive. After eighteen years of professional experience she was twenty-two years old. Her mother had been left a widow with three small children to support, Lottie, Mary and Jack, and, refusing to be separated from the youngsters, had taken them along when she acted in traveling road shows and small stock companies. Jack, the baby, had slept in a wardrobe trunk in Mother Pickford's dressing room, attended by his slightly older sisters. They had learned their theater the hard way,

and Mary had been on the stage from the time she could walk. She had been one of the first to see the screen's future possibilities and had been fortunate in getting her early picture training from D. W. Griffith, who was undoubtedly the first master-director in the United States. She was, and still is, an indefatigable worker, and her early success was no accident.

God gave her beauty, it is true, but God has apparently also created many beautiful dumb-bells. A large number of these have, from time to time, been offered to the picture public as potential favorites, but none of them had the energy, the courage, the personality and the intelligence of Mary Pickford. For more than twenty years she held her following, while other beauties were being raised up and cast down with heart-breaking rapidity. Even when Mary turned to producing instead of acting, she still was "America's Sweetheart"; a crowd still waits wherever it is known she will be; maids in hotels and waiters in restaurants still feel their hearts miss a few beats when they have opportunity to serve her, just as they felt twenty years ago. That this little lady was also an extremely shrewd businesswoman, and at no time underestimated her market value, was another element which did nothing to detract from her material success.

Facing this strong challenge from our chief competitor, our Company decided to meet it by persuading Geraldine Farrar to be the first star of grand opera to enter motion pictures. "Jerry" Farrar, as everyone soon called her, was then at the height of her operatic career, was the idol of New York and had a tremendous following of young female music-lovers known as "Jerryflappers."

She signed a contract with Lasky to join us for eight weeks, during which she was to make no less than three

important feature pictures. The Company was to furnish her a house, a car and the unheard-of sum of twenty thousand dollars for the eight weeks' work. The demand for stars was having its natural economic result, and the day of big picture salaries was dawning.

The idea of taking our most expensive star from the field of grand opera was, perhaps, more daring than the Company realized, because of the different standards and methods of acting in each medium. On the operatic stage "Jerry" was known as a fine actress, which meant that she had more than two facial expressions, that she never tripped over her own feet and that her gestures were not semaphorical. But the long-sustained expression of emotion *a tempo* of the opera house, always subordinated to singing tone and orchestral rhythm, was quite a different problem from the smoothly flowing, intimate, silent and realistic acting which the screen demanded. It meant an instant translation from the most distant and artificial form of acting known to modern man to the closest and most naturalistic method which had yet been evolved. Facing a camera for the first time, an opera singer, more than the ordinary actor, misses his voice.

Jerry herself was somewhat dubious as to her wisdom in plunging so suddenly into unknown waters and meeting a vast new audience voiceless. But valiant was certainly the word for Jerry; she threw herself at the unaccustomed job with great gusto, worked like a horse, took it all as rather a lark and in three days had the whole studio eating out of her hand.

Pending her arrival, there was a certain nervousness to be noticed in the studio. This was to be our first visitor from the magic world of opera, and many rumors of "artistic temperament" were whispered fearfully as we labored to

prepare her three pictures in advance of her coming. Tales were told of the utter unreasonableness of great singers; how impossible it was to get them to take direction; how they were liable to throw things and break furniture in order to express displeasure without hurting their voices; so that the whole plant awaited our distinguished songbird with definite but well-concealed anxiety.

When she turned out to be an honest-to-God two-fisted trouper, strong as an ox and rejoicing in scenes of physical combat, the studio rubbed its eyes as if awaking from a bad dream. When it further developed that she was delightful to work with, kind, considerate and hail-fellow-well-met with the lowliest extra or the newest property boy, the studio turned over on its back and purred.

Jerry Farrar was the first star in our studio to have a special bungalow built for her, which contained dressing room, reception room, kitchen and a workroom furnished chiefly with a grand piano. During the inevitable waits which occur during the production of a picture, Jerry used to practice vocally, and at these times a small crowd of actors, cowboys and other employees would collect outside her quarters, as one perfect aria after another flowed through the open window. If an actor or a technician was unaccountably missing from his appointed place, the order was given: "Go over to Jerry's bungalow and get him"; it was a safe bet that he would be found among the silent listeners outside. I was frequently to be found there myself.

The fact that her pictures were successful indicates that, even without her voice, Jerry's personality and magnetism were attractive to the people, and under C. B.'s skillful guidance her acting met the requirements of that period. This was indeed an achievement for an opera singer, as the Company discovered a few years later when, flushed with

Jerry's success in pictures, it attempted to make a cinematic star of Caruso. Two pictures starring the world's premier tenor were made, but when the first was released its failure was so instantaneous and complete that for once, at least, the press department's favorite word, "Colossal," was justified in describing it. The American public voted with unanimity not unmixed with bitterness that Caruso, without his voice, was the one thing it desired most fervently not to see. No one has ever seen the second Caruso picture: it exists only as an item written in red ink on the Company's ledger.

Of the three subjects selected for Jerry's vehicles I was elected to write two, "Maria Rosa" and "Carmen." Wallace Reid had been chosen as her leading man, and Pedro de Cordoba was to be the "menace" in both pictures. In adapting these two works to the screen several technical difficulties had to be overcome. In "Maria Rosa," for instance, the real hero of the story, the man beloved by the star, has been killed before the play begins, and the dramatic action lies chiefly in the gradual discovery by Maria Rosa that the man she is about to wed is the murderer of her husband who was the great love of her life. In other words, Wally Reid's part was not in the original play at all; but by now I was a full-fledged scenario writer, supposed to solve little problems like this without pausing in my stride, and, as the immortal line from "Once in a Lifetime" has it, "with no time wasted in thinking." In this case I devoted the early part of the picture to what had happened before the play began, with the trifling change that Pedro hadn't actually killed Wally; he had tried to, and thought he had succeeded, but Wally had escaped and was in durance vile during the actual period of the play. Then followed the drama intact until the end, when Wally, after heartbreaking privations, appeared in

the nick of time; thus turning what the author had fondly imagined would be stark tragedy into quite a satisfactory evening. No doubt the intrinsic merit of a most excellent play was not at all improved by these cinematic tamperings, but picture audiences of that period had as yet developed no liking for unrelieved tragedy and, after all, there had to be a part for Wally Reid.

The difficulties which arose in adapting "Carmen" to the screen were more subtle. This opera had been chosen as the most important offering of Jerry's first group of pictures because it was one of her most famous rôles; in fact, in this country at least, she was considered the great "Carmen" of her day, and the Company thought it was a master stroke to show her first in a character with which she was so strongly identified.

Several weeks before she arrived in Hollywood I was working diligently on the script, when I was called to a conference with the Director-General and Mr. Lasky. As I entered the office C. B.'s thoughtful frown and Jesse's bland air of childlike innocence told me that all was not as it should be; our old friend, Trouble, was about to rear its ugly head.

"Ye summoned me, milords," I said, quaintly; "what is your pleasure?"

But the others' mood was entirely twentieth century. "How are you coming on with 'Carmen,' Bill?" asked C. B.

"Fine, boys, fine," I answered. "There's going to be a mighty good part for 'Michaela,' sort of a sacred and profane love contrast—"

"Is Michaela in the book?" interrupted C. B.

"What book?"

"Prosper Mérimée's book," said the Director-General acidly. "You know, 'Carmen,' the book you're adapting to

the screen; or did you think I was talking about the Bible?"

"Nay," I said gently, "I had no such thought; but it did occur to me that you might be speaking of the opera, 'Carmen,' which I am making into a scenario."

A look, fraught with much meaning, passed between the Director-General and the Company's president.

"You see, Bill," Jesse explained soothingly, "there's been a hitch; we can't use the opera."

"You mean we've got to do something else?"

"Oh no, we've got to do 'Carmen'; we've announced it and advertised it, so we've got to do it—but we can't use the opera."

"Why not, for God's sake?"

Jesse smiled encouragingly: "Well, you see, we've just found out that the libretto's copyrighted."

My quick brain at once found the solution. "Why don't we buy the rights?" I asked.

As C. B. fastened his directorial eye upon me I could feel all my thirty-seven years but two drop from my shoulders. "The boy's clever," he remarked to Jesse. "Damned clever; just imagine him thinking of that all by himself. You see, Bill," he added, turning to me with infinite patience, "by a strange coincidence we, too, thought of that; we tried to buy the rights and when we got their figure we naturally thought it included the Louvre with all its contents. There's some good stuff in the Louvre and we might have broken even on the deal; but now, to our amazement, we find the price quoted was just for the right to use the libretto; they wouldn't even throw in Napoleon's tomb or the Venus de Milo; so as this company was not founded for the sole purpose of wiping out the French national debt, we must make other plans." He paused to light his pipe, eying me sar-

donically, as I saw the elements of my carefully prepared construction flutter to the ground like autumn leaves.

"The music isn't copyrighted, Bill," Jesse put in helpfully; but as this was a good twelve years before the coming of sound, I accepted his statement as a mere gesture of sympathy.

"The situation is, then," I figured out, "that we can use Mr. Mérimée's story, which none of our audience ever heard of, to dramatize an opera which they all know, but which we can't use."

"My son," said C. B. with great urbanity, "you reason like Archimedes himself; that's just exactly what you've got to do."

Once more the president's soft tones oozed into the scene, like sweet oil flowing on a wound: "We're counting on you, Bill," said Jesse. "If anyone else was handling this I might be worried, but I know you can do it, old feller." This was, of course, delightful and flattering, although it seemed to leave the problem much as it was.

"But Michaela's not in Mérimée and she is in the opera," I wailed.

"Lookit, Bill," said the Director-General, dropping easily into the language of the people. "Who the hell cares about Michaela? Even Mérimée didn't want her. And don't kid yourself that the audience knows the story of the opera; they don't. Not one in a hundred could tell you what any scene is about; they know some of the music, mostly the Toreador song, and all they know about the story is that Carmen was a gypsy gal who took a young Spanish soldier for a ride, then fell in love with a bullfighter and got bumped off by the young soldier because she threw him over. That's all in Mérimée, isn't it?"

"Yes," I faltered, "but the characters are different: Escamillio's name is Lucas, and Carmen is married to Garcia and—"

"Oh, don't be so damned academic," said the Director-General. "You've got smugglers, and a tavern, and soldiers, and a fight between two dames in a cigar factory (and give that the works, too), and the camp in the mountains and, best of all, the bullfight; star the bullfight. All that's in Mérimée, and you're supposed to be a dramatist, so if you can't make the audience think they're seeing the opera, without butting into their damned copyright, you'd better go right home and take a big dose of Lydia Pinkham's Compound—"

"All right, laddie, all right," I interrupted. "I will etch you a Carmen the like of which man has never seen; she'll break every Commandment except the copyright law and, possibly, at the end, I'll have her fall in love with the bull; it's quite in character and—"

I never finished the sentence, because something in their faces told me that the conference was about over.

Just twenty years later I had occasion to look at our picture of "Carmen." It was hard to believe that what I saw on the screen was actually the same work upon which so much honest effort had been expended. As I had gone with the screen, step by step, in its gradual evolution, my memory tended to clothe our earlier efforts with technical attributes which had become essential and commonplace in the modern film. Their absence was startling. Our beloved "Carmen," which had been hailed as an achievment in 1915, was as much like a modern motion picture as the little three-toed eohippus is like Twenty Grand; or as the earliest "horseless carriage" is like the streamlined, high-powered automobile of today. For the first time I actually realized what the

constant pressure of millions of people who want a certain thing improved, can do to bring about that improvement. Looked at with 1935 eyes, our picture was badly photographed, the lighting was childish, the acting was awful, the writing atrocious and—may Allah be merciful—the direction terrible. The only interesting thing about our work was the fact that we had taken the same pride in it as Henry Ford took in his Model T, or the Wright brothers in their first plane. As I watched the bizarre affair flicker by I reflected that perhaps it is just as well we have no film recordings of David Garrick, Edwin Booth or Salvini: they might only shatter cherished ideals. "Carmen" would have lived in my memory as a fine picture if only I hadn't seen it again. But all things are relative to their times. Few of our modern hostesses, fond as they are of royalty, could survive a dinner with Richard the Lion-hearted.

As I recall those breathless, active, exciting days of Jerry's first visit to Hollywood, when the screen was young and every double-exposure was an event, I remember that it was she who gave the first "Hollywood party" I ever attended. It was some years before the term "Hollywood party" was to become the synonym for a meeting of unrestrained revelry, but nevertheless Jerry's hospitality pointed the way to what might be called a more abundant night life. Her three pictures were all finished and "in the can," and she decided upon a farewell celebration at her house to which the whole studio was invited. No one stayed away. The entire lower floor had been made ready for dancing; caterers from downtown were prepared to feed an army, and the quantity and variety of liquid refreshments were such as I have only seen equaled during prohibition; moreover, it was Saturday night and no one had to be at the

studio until Monday. After a year of uninterrupted stress and strain, the studio was taking a night off.

Jerry herself looked magnificent in some creation which I find it difficult to describe after twenty years. She made everyone feel at home; in fact, more than at home as I gathered from wifely eyes turned upon disporting husbands. All doors were open to the lovely grounds where cozy nooks, overhung by bushes, provided sanctuary for those guests who desired to take a quiet nap when the entertainment overcame them.

Jerry made a point of dancing with everyone. Her endurance was quite wonderful; as far as I could observe, she never sat down and never kept still; she was Carmen. As the evening wore on I noticed that handsome Lou Tellegen, our latest importation, was being particularly devoted to his hostess. He looked quite unhappy when she was dancing with anyone else, which was most of the time, but he always turned up to ask for the next.

At six in the morning the dancing had stopped and most of the guests had gone. Jerry had removed her shoes and stockings and was walking barefoot on the dewy lawn, to rest her feet. Tellegen was talking earnestly to her, but they both waved to us as we drove off.

An hour later, Tellegen drove her, in his roadster, to Riverside for early Mass, and a short time later they were married. It was my first Hollywood party.

CHAPTER VIII

MEANWHILE the steady conflict between writer and director went merrily on. In spite of the fact that the essential value of story-telling, as an art in itself, was rapidly being recognized, the director still remained, as he probably always will, the most important single factor in putting a story on the screen. It was not easy to upset picture tradition which had always placed sole responsibility for each film upon the man who directed its actual making. And this tradition is, it seems to me, to a certain extent well founded. If the writer is too exact in defining every move of the camera, every cut and every angle, he robs the director of freedom in his own proper field; he ties the director's hands to the point of cramping his cinematic style and preventing his use of the camera as an instrument for emphasizing dramatic values instead of merely recording action.

Ever since D. W. Griffith first began to evolve "screen syntax," by which is meant the dramatic relationship of one shot to another; the psychological value of properly placed close-ups and change of distance and angle; the intercutting of separate story threads in a given scene, together with the well-timed flow of all these elements to produce an effective progression of dramatic cumulation, he bequeathed to all who followed him an art which is primarily the director's and which the writer may approximate but should not appropriate. The director of a motion picture plays a more creative part in the finished work than does the conductor of a symphony; for the director not only

conducts but, to a large extent, orchestrates the composition. No written manuscript can set down the complex interplay of those various instruments which make the harmony of a motion picture: not only the action and reaction of human characters upon one another, but also the vitally important values which background, lighting, movement and picture composition add to dramatic effect. All these are separate, elemental tones which the director must combine into a symphonic whole. He sets the tempi and determines at every moment which instrument carries the theme, and the extent and manner of its emphasis over the other parts. Screen-writers, unlike composers, cannot completely orchestrate their work on paper.

It is simple enough to say that the writer's function is to conceive, the director's to realize. That is, no doubt, true as far as it goes; but properly to realize a motion-picture manuscript, no matter how well written, the director, too, must conceive in terms of light, sound, motion and, above all, in terms of dramatic values wrought by technical craft. These are values which the average writer feels only vaguely; he calls this feeling his sense of drama. The director must feel these values exactly; he, too, calls this feeling his sense of drama. They are both right; they are both creating the picture, and I, for one, cannot lay down an exact line of demarcation, or find the spot where the writer ends and the director begins. That is probably why so many fine results have been achieved by writer and director working in close collaboration, each conscious of the other's field of creation, but reinforcing rather than limiting each other.

In the early days, of course, the complete subordination of writer to director frequently wrought havoc in many pictures which should have been better than they were. This, however, was not always the director's fault. Few

writers of the primitive cinema won academic honors as authors, and as real authors began to drift into the field they seemed to take strange pleasure in their utter ignorance of the medium and its demands. For the most part they regarded their studio experiences as literary slumming and delighted to talk about the "prostitution" of their art, not realizing, poor darlings, that what the studios were offering was honorable marriage. They could not, of course, marry so far beneath them; the most their literary honor would concede was that, for gold, they would lie awhile with this new Caliban.

Many directors, it is true, did not have good "story sense"; they thought in terms of individual scenes rather than of integrated plot, and showed an almost unquenchable desire to stop the story in order to develop what they thought was good incident. They never paused to think why a good play seldom contains any scene which can be lifted out and made to stand alone effectively; or why many a bad play includes a scene or two of real dramatic power.

As a result of the necessary collaboration of these two forces, authorial and directorial, linked but not yet welded, it was only human nature for the writer to hail every success with, "See what I did," and every failure with, "See what they did to me"; while the director of a hit also said, "See what I did," and in case of a flop remarked sadly, "I did the best I could with a rotten story."

It was not until the coming of sound that this gentle art of passing the buck ceased, as between writer and director. Nowadays the "associate producer" takes entire responsibility for the work and, in the average production, both writer and director find themselves governed by a superior intellect whose judgment is neither obscured nor weakened by those whims and prejudices so often to be found in the

creative artist. Today, too, there is an art of the motion picture which stands on the firm ground of experience. It is constantly being improved, but the basic technic of story-telling on the screen has evolved through more than twenty years of trial and error. Both writers and directors must know this technic, and writers have finally learned to "think picture." Scripts are written in "master scenes" instead of detailed "cutting continuity," a method which gives the director the freedom he needs but makes it imperative that he follow the essential story as written.

Cinematic art and technic, however, had reached no such stability in the late fall of 1915, when, as a writer, I found myself impatient, and a little tired of the writer-director struggle for control. In some cases the battle was complicated by a romantic attachment between the director and his star which made them allies in seeing that the scenario did right by the little woman. I tremble to think what would have happened to "Hamlet" at this period, if it should have been directed by a man in love with the actress playing Ophelia. A few of these romances even resulted in matrimony, but in most cases this final step of authentication was ultimately avoided, another star proving more attractive, another director showing more promise, or innocent by-standers, in the shape of current husbands and/or wives, standing as insurmountable obstacles to Love's young dream. But deep, passionate love, though it might shake a star's soul, never shook her determination to have many lengthy close-ups; and no director in the throes of adoration ever had his sense of relative values improved by the experience; at least, not until it was all over. Consequently, it was often no small achievement to get a picture finally edited so that the plot could writhe its way between all the lovely, intimate views of its beautiful heroine; shots which

Blanche Sweet in "The Blacklist," 1915.

On location, the author tries to explain about life to Clara Bow, 1926.

the director had been led to believe were absolutely essential to the picture's success.

In addition to the constant wear and tear of problems like these, I was fed up on stories. In the fourteen months since I had joined the Company, in addition to writing a great number of scenarios myself, I had collaborated on many others and had read and decided, pro or con, on so many more that my brain felt like a melting-pot into which had been poured all the stories of the world. Moreover, I began to see that for some time yet, owing to the very method by which movies were made, the director was bound to be the greatest single force in determining a picture's final value. Recipes as written in a cookbook may be perfect, but in the last analysis, much depends upon the cook.

My enthusiasm for the motion picture had been steadily growing; I was more and more conscious of its increasing hold on the millions who, monthly, were being added to our audience, and I desired as never before to take as large a part as I could in the work which was trying to give form and substance to this newest and greatest medium for reaching the hearts and imagination of the people.

If the director's influence on the writer was destined to be stronger than the writer's on the director, I wanted to be a director. Somewhere in the back of my mind echoed that sound bit of advice: "If you can't lick 'em—join 'em." As head of the scenario department I was sick of my supervisorial job. I wanted to be a mother, not a midwife; to bear one child at a time from conception to delivery. I wanted to nurse my own picture myself and not turn it over at birth to be raised into maturity by others who might not realize that its lame leg could be cured and need not be amputated.

As a director, I thought, I would be able to protect my

own pet story-values; no other conception could interpose itself between mine and the audience. Of course I would have to stand or fall by the result: if the public didn't like the picture I'd have no one to blame; it would be entirely my own funeral. But there were so many new methods I wanted to try; directorial technic of the period was so obvious; I was eager to experiment with suggestion rather than complete demonstration; I thought that, with proper care, it might be possible to tell an audience that a character was dead without showing the lifeless body or even its subsequent burial. Already rumblings of approaching censorship were in the air and we were all striving desperately to predict the coming of a baby without suggesting that any biological process might be involved, thus putting naughty ideas into Junior's head. It was an era when screen methods, themselves most immature, were based upon a firm belief that our objective was the mentality of the nine-year-old child. I was daring enough to think that people of adult minds might be lured into the audience if our own technic should progress beyond the nine-year level. Neither did I fear that the morons would stay away if pictures began to grow up. Morons still like a good yarn even when told artistically. But it must be a good yarn. The average picture-goer will not accept stories of "special" interest which are elementally dull; he will not accept bad photography and primitive production as a rare chance to educate himself cinematically, just because he doesn't understand the foreign language. It has always been so in the theater; it will always be so on the screen: no collection of so-called "artistic values" will ever be an acceptable substitute for elemental dramatic value, nor has good art in writing, acting and production ever kept a single soul away from a film he would have liked even if badly done.

At any rate, I wanted to launch my own boat, chart my

own course and sail either into the sunrise or onto the rocks. Much to my relief, C. B. fell in with the idea. We needed directors; the writing department was in good shape and contained at least two people ready to take executive control. I was to write my own story, direct my own picture and might God have mercy on my soul.

The first important discovery I made in my new capacity was that the director's point of view was not nearly as unreasonable as I had supposed. Faced by the necessity of handling my story in four dimensions (time being the fourth), I soon found that certain scenes, which read like little masterpieces on paper, began to resemble cartoons if produced too literally. As a writer I had always tended to resent the director's screams that this scene wouldn't move smoothly or that one wouldn't time; now, as director, my own screams were all the more uninhibited by the fact that I alone was the writer. During the course of my first picture as director, I used language about the damn fool who wrote the script that I feel sure I would have taken from no one else.

The picture itself was an original story called "The Ragamuffin," and its leading player was Blanche Sweet, who had just joined our studio. She was a talented girl who had served her apprenticeship under D. W. Griffith and had much audience appeal. I considered myself lucky to have so good a star for my first directorial venture. I had been told that the picture must be just forty-five hundred feet in length, and took such pains not to waste a single foot of precious film that when I had finished shooting and assembled the story complete, with every scene I had taken and nothing left out, I had exactly forty-four hundred feet of picture. Adding the titles brought the film to exactly the length required. These were, indeed, different methods

from those which came later, when a director was considered economical if he used less than two hundred thousand feet of film for a seven-thousand-foot picture. As against this, I imagine that my whole production of "The Ragamuffin" drew less than seven thousand feet of raw stock from the laboratory.

This same story, which was my first production, also became my forty-first, when, ten years later, I rewrote it and made it again; this time under the name of "The Splendid Crime" with Bebe Daniels in the star rôle. It was the first production, however, which really began my education in motion pictures. I learned how closely the director must work with the various departments which collaborate on the picture, and that he must learn a good deal about lighting and a great deal about the camera.

In those days there were no such positions as film-cutter and film-editor. The director himself, or his assistant, cut and assembled the film. The rejected bits all went on the cutting-room floor, and when a mistake in cutting had been made it was not unusual to spend hours going through the waste film to find a necessary six-inch piece among the hundreds of remnants. After having had this discouraging experience several times, I started the system (and I think I was the first to start it) of putting back all cast-off bits of scenes into the numbered racks; a simple innovation which saved hours and sometimes days of time. I cut, assembled and edited my first fourteen pictures entirely with my own hands, and during the process acquired a knowledge of screen continuity more definite and exact than I had been able to learn as a writer. This was most valuable, for in that period the director had to know his cutting-continuity as he shot; there was neither time nor money to make the host of "covering shots" and possible alternatives upon which

William deMille, Lois Wilson, and Richard Dix in "Icebound," 1924.

William deMille and staff enact the making of a scene under the actual direction of James Cruze in his production "Hollywood," 1923.

the modern director leans so heavily. There are, undoubtedly, many cases today where a director protects himself so thoroughly that he may add twenty per cent to the picture's cost; but the principle has been established, and perhaps it is a wise one, that "it is better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it."

But probably the most valuable thing I learned from my first production was the close bond which should exist between director and writer. I had discovered that the two functions require a certain amount of adjustment to each other even when combined in one person. When two people are involved the same close teamwork is essential, even if it is more difficult to achieve. The photo-playwright needs a greater technical knowledge to understand his medium than is required of the writer for the stage. The tools of his craft are more varied and more intricate than those of the theater: ever-changing distance between audience and scene; the movable condition of the audience itself; the ability to isolate and emphasize any element of an ensemble, and the ubiquitous quality of the camera which allows it to focus, at every moment, upon the point of highest dramatic value; all these make necessary a much more involved technic, both of writing and of direction, than that of ordinary stagecraft. In the beginning of motion pictures, writing and direction were invariably combined in one man, and that man was the director. Even though he followed a bare outline done by a writer, the director actually composed the photoplay. As the writer learned to take more responsibility and developed his work from mere story outline to scene-by-scene dramatic construction, and then to incidental detail within the scene itself, the two crafts became theoretically separated but never actually untangled. They are still so interdependent that I, for one, believe the best results can

only be obtained by sympathetic, creative teamwork between the two. Motion-picture history is full of writer-director combinations who have turned out much of the screen's best work.

The question of who should have final authority over a picture is one which is apparently impossible of general solution. There are a few "director-producers" who are capable of taking full responsibility; there are a few "writer-producers" who have entire charge of their pictures and outrank their directors. But these small groups can only turn out a few pictures every year, possibly a hundred. For the year 1938–39 the industry demands more than six hundred feature films. Someone must take charge of the other five hundred. That is the current artistic problem which must be faced, the problem which has faced the new art from its earliest days: the problem of how best to use highly individualized, creative work in a general scheme which calls imperatively for factory output. It is a time-honored custom of the artist to poke fun at all motion-picture executives, but when we consider that the industry is really necessary to make the art possible, to nourish it and support its growth, and that if the industry fails, the art loses its only paying patron, we begin to realize that even the much abused executive lies upon no bed of roses.

It was not until I became a director with absolute authority over my picture that I felt in full measure the many difficulties which the executives as well as the craftsmen must solve. When I first joined the studio I had been thrilled by a new world, a new kind of drama, the vision of an audience of millions. I felt myself a part of the new enterprise and delighted in my efforts to contribute to its growth. But, as a writer, I never felt myself so completely identified with the picture as I did when I directed it. I

suppose only the director feels the full, one hundred per cent thrill of the movie-maker. The picture is his own more than it belongs to any other single person of all the many who must collaborate in its production. He it is who takes all the materials—the story, the sets, the lights, the characters, the actors, the costumes, the makeups, the properties, and molds them moment by moment into the living thing which is a motion picture. He literally pours himself into the work; not only his art and craft, his knowledge and experience, but also his vitality, his sweat, the hypnotic force by which he welds his actors into that pattern of the whole which is his conception of the picture. He creates the actual thing which the audience sees; no other factor can interpose itself between his work and the public. In some cases, editors or supervisors may cut, twist or transpose, but what is left on the screen is still the director's work. That is why the director's sense of creation, even of possession, probably outweighs that of anyone else connected with the picture.

No doubt some writers and certainly many stars will disagree with me on this point. But the writers must admit that between their work and their public looms the figure of the man who interprets and completes the story; and even the most generous star realizes that there must be certain necessary though weaker portions of the picture when the principal player is not on the screen. Every part of the picture, however, is the director's work; he is never "off the screen" and has no breathing spells.

In all my nineteen years of motion-picture direction I never lost the keen thrill of adventure which goes with that job. The feeling of responsibility, quite frightening at times, also carries a certain joy of accomplishment when the work is done. To stand on a stage surrounded by actors, technicians and all the complex and expensive paraphernalia

of the craft, all waiting the word, *your* word, to be set in motion; to feel the terrific pressure of time, expressing itself in vast sums of money which you can save or waste, and yet not be stampeded into accepting unsatisfactory results; to give the kind of leadership and understanding which unites your various crews, and the many different personalities which compose them, into one compact little army, all working smoothly, efficiently for the good of the picture; to create absolute discipline on your set without noise and with no injustice; to guide sensitive players into your conception of the play without checking their own sense of creative effort; to get the best they have to give by drawing it out of them rather than by driving it into them; to bear in mind the context of the scene so that its force and tempo may fit snugly into the progression of other scenes yet to be shot; to do all these things at once and feel the picture slowly emerging from obscurity, gradually taking shape, coming to life before your eyes and under your hands—this is to have lived.

The true emotional ebb and flow of a picture can be set down on paper only approximately; it finds its realization, for the first time, as the director works it out with his players on the set, under the lights.

The most strenuous as well as the most exciting part of a director's job is when he is "on location," the term being used to denote any shots made outside the studio proper. It may mean only a few hours downtown on the street or in a factory yard, or it may mean a week's trip into the high Sierras. In either case, for the director, it is the adventure of meeting the unknown; adapting the work to meet unexpected conditions; planning the shots to make the most of whatever pictorial advantages he finds and, above all, getting his stuff "in the can" before lengthening shadows and

failing daylight make further work impossible. For the phrase "Time marches on" has a particularly poignant meaning on location, where a difference of half an hour may determine whether the location is finished or whether the whole troupe of fifty or sixty people with several truck-loads of equipment must be brought back next morning to complete the sequence. Even the sun itself has no compassion for the director on location; it may be on the right when the scene is begun, in which case it will be on the left a few hours later, changing the direction of shadows and making necessary much ingenious trickery to prevent the change from being apparent.

Every director, no matter how carefully he has studied his work in advance, has experienced the horrible feeling of being "stuck" on location, owing to some unexpected difficulty. Something new must be evolved to solve the problem, and as he racks his brains he is always conscious of old Sol, steady and implacable, moving down toward the horizon and whispering: "Think fast, old boy; *I'm* not going to wait for you." Meanwhile, a numerous and highly expensive crowd of actors and technicians, standing idly by, waiting for his instruction, does nothing whatever to soothe his nerves. There is no one but God to tell him what to do, and God is frequently busy on other locations, solving the problems of other directors. Actors relax and read while this is going on; property men, camera crew, sound crew and "grips," take it easy and enjoy life in the open until the director (who should be outwardly cool and calm) finally reaches a decision which, if wrong, will cost his company thousands of dollars. This is one reason why shooting a motion picture in the heat and dust of a desert location carries with it something of the thrill of shooting a tiger in India.

As an example of having to work quickly and under pressure, I recall the time, some years later, when I was making a picture of Owen Davis's prize-winning play "Icebound," with Richard Dix and Lois Wilson in the leading rôles. To get the authentic atmosphere of snow-covered New England we decided to make the film in our New York studio, and picked out an ideal location up in the Catskills for our exterior locations. The snow up there, I was informed, was never less than two feet deep and lasted all winter. This seemed to suit our needs perfectly, so I went up to the Catskills in December with Wilfred Buckland, the art director, and my assistant; we picked out the type of house we needed, with just the right surroundings, and photographed it inside and out so that we could duplicate the interior on the stage and it would match our exterior shots. We planned to start work in the studio and be all ready to jump for the location as soon as the snow was deep and well frozen. We figured that about five days' work would be needed to make the outdoor scenes; we had included a great many exterior shots in order to make the most of our real snow and authentic backgrounds.

Everything being all set, I started about the second of January to do the studio shots. There had been no snow as yet, but nobody worried. "Just wait," they said, "when it starts so late it'll be a regular blizzard."

We waited. Week after week passed and still no snow. "Most unusual," they said, and I realized, for the first time, that "unusual" weather was not exclusively a California product.

Finally I had finished everything which could be made in the studio, and we waited for the weather. I had taken much pains to show lots of snow and ice through the windows of the interior scenes, and the inside of our house on

the stage was irrevocably tied in to that particular house in the country. We waited. Life, from the director's point of view, was just a huge taximeter ticking off hundreds of dollars every hour.

A few days later it began to snow, and weather reports predicted that the storm would be violent and would last at least twenty-four hours. By nightfall my whole troupe was up in the mountains in a little country hotel which we more than filled, and I prepared to wait for the promised blizzard to blow itself out. I saw visions of lovely shots: Richard Dix carrying Lois Wilson in his arms, breaking through virgin snow drifts; Charlie Puffer's horse and sleigh (local additions to the cast) fighting their way along almost impassable roads; the old house itself, barely visible under the masses of snow which covered it. We might have to wait a few days; I knew what these heavy storms were like in the mountains, but it would be worth it.

The next day dawned bright and clear; there was about a foot of snow on the ground and no drifts more than three feet high; but the weather was crisp and cold and, even though I had to abandon my more heroic imaginings, at least it was real snow and the country looked icebound enough for our purpose. We set to work with high hearts and by evening had secured our quota of shots which "felt good" as we took them.

The second day was fair and warmer. We worked more feverishly, but by quitting time there were still forty-four shots to make and our snow had shrunk; there was a bare six inches left and the weather felt more and more like spring.

That night I called a consultation. "Boys and girls," I announced, "something tells me that tomorrow will turn our icebound New England into a nice, warm, black mud-

puddle. We have three days' work to do and, at best, one day in which to do it. Are you with me? Shall we hit the line hard and win for dear old Paramount?"

They were with me. We knew the location pretty well by then, and late into that night we planned our shots and I went over the action with Richard, Lois and the others. When we went to bed it was practically time to get up, for we were on the ground as soon as it was light enough to work. And how those splendid troupers did work; a quick camera set-up, one short rehearsal and then we took the scene. Sometimes we shot the rehearsal and, if it looked all right, rushed on to the next set-up. Never have I been so thankful for my compact little unit, all working together, no lost motion; each department doing its stuff in perfect co-operation with all the others. Scene after scene was made with no stopping for lunch or for anything else, and all the time the day got warmer and warmer, until we could positively hear the snow melt and began to have trouble in preventing the camera from showing large drops of perspiration on the faces of our warmly-clad actors as they shivered in the supposedly biting cold.

By mid-afternoon large, black patches of mud began to mar the frozen sweep of the countryside, and camera lines had to be shifted to avoid them. When we finally reached the last few scenes there was almost no snow left, and the entire company had to carry what there was in buckets, shovels and dustpans to spread upon the ground behind our actors and cover black spots in the landscape. As we made our last shot I don't believe there were two buckets of clean snow left on the grounds around the house; the entire front yard was a sea of mud, but we had licked the weather and had made forty-four scenes in seven hours. A few days later when I looked at this work in the projection room and

Douglas Fairbanks and Agnes deMille solicit funds to feed French soldiers' orphans, 1917.

C.B. in Captain's uniform; Mary Pickford and Wallace Reid, (with flag), 1917.

The author directing Kay Johnson and Basil Rathbone in her death scene; "This Mad World," 1929.

saw the cold, bleak, lonely atmosphere which the screen revealed, it was hard to believe that just outside the camera lines was the dark ooze of a sudden thaw peopled by twenty-five or thirty sweating artists and artisans.

But the weather, after all, had the last laugh. Two days after we returned to New York there was a real blizzard, followed by a protracted cold spell. Drifts up in the country were mountainous and roads hard to break through. These were exactly the conditions we had waited for so long and so in vain. That is why motion-picture directors must never look back, if they hope to preserve their sanity. They must live in the present and look toward the future: the past is on the cutting-room floor.

When I first assumed my new duties as director, with power to hire and fire the members of my cast, I was quite surprised and just a bit startled to discover that my general personal attraction seemed to have increased in a sudden and amazing fashion. Never before had I realized the number of charming and ambitious young women who were willing, nay, anxious to "pay the price" as they so naïvely expressed it. They cared so deeply for their art that they cheerfully offered to take me along with it if only the combination led to their professional advancement. In order to assure me that their motives were not ulterior, and as a pretty gesture of appreciation, some of them implied that their proposed sacrifice would not be too bitter to be borne with equanimity.

This was embarrassing. During my many months as writer at the studio not a single one of these attractive damsels had ever suggested that any sort of "price" paid to me might be either advantageous, necessary or even entertaining. Was it possible that the purple robe and glittering crown of the director had finally revealed the tender, lov-

able qualities of the man beneath them? It would have been delightful to think so. But, alas, even Hollywood, with all its tempting sirens, cannot entirely stop the ticking of a brain which has always had to work for a living. Childlike and unsuspecting I may be, but in the face of such an abrupt transition, my tottering modesty was saved, against its will perhaps, by the inner conviction that all the ladies wanted was a job. If the sight of the writer, day after day, only made them think of the quiet peace of a country churchyard, why should sight of the director suddenly lash their storm-tossed souls to heights of erotic self-sacrifice for their beloved art?

Their technic in offering what was supposed to be dearer to them than life itself varied from the direct attack of desperation to the subtler insinuation of love and art being so necessary to each other. In every case, however, they wore garments which did nothing to conceal such goods as were being placed on the counter. The director would never be able to claim that he had accepted the price "sight unseen." This was, of course, fair enough, but when a gorgeous creature with soulful eyes would lean over my desk and ask in deep, vibrant tones: "Don't you think an actress can do better work if she has lived and loved?" I always pressed the hidden button which summoned my secretary to call me to a conference. For one reason, I don't know the answer to the lady's question; and for another, I have found that, though I may perhaps lack both the soul-strength and resistive power of St. Anthony, a sense of humor is frequently an excellent substitute.

CHAPTER IX

The years 1914 to 1916 might well be called the birth-years of feature pictures, for in that short period several major battles were fought which decided the course of screen history for the next decade, if not for its whole future.

First, there was the fight, already referred to, between the independents and the Trust; a struggle to make longer feature pictures the principal art form of the new dramatic medium. Linked with this, and hardly less important from a practical standpoint, was the battle for a new method of selling pictures to the exhibitors; a new releasing system by which producers could get an adequate share of the profits their pictures earned at the box office, and thus acquire enough capital of their own to experiment with "bigger and better pictures." For, be it remembered, up to this time the producer took most of the risk and got little of the profit which accrued to patent-owners as a certainty and to theater-owners as a possibility. The gradually growing band of independent producers faced an impossible situation; if a picture lost money it was their money, and if a picture made money the proceeds were gently but firmly swept into the coffers of the Trust. It was the old story of labor and capital on one side against special privilege on the other, and revolt was in the air. The various independents, while always glad of an opportunity to cut one another's throats, (a custom which is still enjoyed although now practiced under Marquis of Queensbury rules), were then forced to

make common cause against those rugged individualists who had had the business foresight and the hundred per cent Americanism to buy up all the essential patents controlling the industry. Long were the nocturnal conferences and many the proposed alliances, dalliances and misalliances which kept the industry seething with excitement, plans, plots and schemes.

Through all this turmoil the figure of one man began to appear, vaguely at first, then more and more distinctly, until finally it dominated the strife-torn cinematic world. It was the figure of a small, quiet man, soft-spoken and studious in appearance, who in 1898, at the age of twenty-five, had landed in the United States from Hungary, friendless and with the sum of forty dollars as his entire working capital.

His name was Adolph Zukor, and he entered the fur business; then he became interested in penny-arcades and nickelodeons and was the first picture showman to nail his flag fast to the mast of feature pictures. His first move was to buy the American rights to a four-reel French picture, "Queen Elizabeth," and then to interest important men of the theater in the despised cinema.

He it was who led the independent forces in their fight for freedom of opportunity on the screen, to make all the theaters of the country available to longer films with worth while subjects, more important players and more authentic and elaborate productions. He also led the revolution which finally freed the producer from that bondage in which the Trust held him by its control of all the better theaters, its fixed rental price of ten cents per foot for all film, no matter what its class, and the arbitrary ruling against showing longer pictures in any of its houses. The details and complexities of these fights have been well recorded by Terry

Victor Moore in "The Clown," 1916.

"Water stuff." End of drowning scene. Victor Moore and "Florence" in "The Clown," 1916.

Thomas Meighan and Marie Doro in "Common Ground," 1916.

Thomas Meighan and Lila Lee in "The Prince Chap," 1919.

Ramsaye, by Ben Hampton, and by Will Irwin in his biography of Zukor, which, with characteristic honesty, was not given to the world as an autobiography.

Making pictures, as I was, in the dust and heat of Hollywood, I was only dimly aware of these mighty conflicts which were being waged, mostly in the East, for control of theaters and booking so that our company, as well as Zukor's, would not be stifled through a lack of marketing facilities for our product. News from the political battlefront drifted in to me via C. B. and Jesse Lasky, but it all seemed far away and rather unreal. Most of the opposing generals were nothing but names to me. I only knew that I was completely in sympathy with everyone on our side, if, as and when it could be determined just who they were. It was hard to be sure. Motion-picture loyalties have a peculiarly evanescent quality; they may be too intense to last very long; and in a general competition for personal power and individual advantage it is sometimes unavoidable that in reaching for a pal's hand, we find that we have him by the neck. After all, business is business; the show must go on, and it is part of the higher unselfishness to prevent a friend from being in a position to do us harm and thus cause him to suffer the torture of self-reproach.

Our company had started in with the same general idea as Zukor's, and now, as his plans developed, he needed more product to insure a program of pictures large enough to supply the chain of theaters which he was getting under his control. It was quite natural, therefore, that he should propose a merger of the two companies, together with several smaller ones. The merger took place in June, 1916, and the new organization was known as the "Famous-Players-Lasky Co." With the combined facilities of our several studios we could now engage to make one hundred and four

pictures a year, enough to supply the entire needs of any theater which booked our product. This merger, engineered so adroitly by young Mr. Zukor, laid one of the main cornerstones of a new world industry. It marked the beginning of the end of the Trust.

The matter of product being arranged, the next major battle was to control the booking offices which stood as middlemen between manufacturer and exhibitor. By this control alone could the producer be kept out of the power of the distributor and secure for himself a fair share of the profits of his own pictures.

Again the soft-voiced, quiet-mannered Mr. Zukor went to work. There ensued a series of open engagements accompanied by secret, diplomatic intrigues which made Balkan politics look like amateur theatricals. When the carnage finally subsided and the dust began to settle, the shy Mr. Zukor emerged from under a heap of the slain, holding tenderly between his hands a few blood-stained stock certificates which represented complete control of Paramount, the strongest distributing organization in the field.

This, naturally, called for another merger, which was immediately effected, the company ultimately being known as "Paramount Pictures"; making its own product, distributing it through its own exchanges and owning or controlling enough "key theaters" throughout the country to insure a domestic market. As president of Paramount, Adolph Zukor, the penniless immigrant of twenty years before, was now the strongest single figure in motion-pictures.

The battle against the Trust had been finally won; no one could now stand between the picture-maker and his public. Pictures were now free to grow, to find their own form with no arbitrary rules to limit them except the will of the people. This was, of course, before professional politi-

cians had discovered that official motion-picture censorship would not only provide a large number of jobs for the faithful, but would also make it possible to reward with public office those members of their party who felt that ignorance was the noblest form of innocence and that any kind of drama which recognized either the facts of life or the frailty of mankind could have only one effect upon a naturally vicious population—the complete abandonment of decency and morality.

The feature picture was now definitely established as the main form of cinema entertainment, and though the transition had taken very few years, the public had become so accustomed to the new idea—an idea which it had supported from the first—that most people had already forgotten the program of short subjects which had been the rule until so recently. By 1916, any company which wished to be considered important had to make feature pictures. In our own studio we noticed little change, as we had never made anything else, but to many companies the change was vital, and sometimes mortal. To Adolph Zukor, more than to any other one man, should go the credit for this major advance, which was won neither by accident nor good luck, but by an amazing generalship accompanied by concentrated determination.

Although I knew little about the politics involved in these various commercial wars, I became increasingly aware of the quiet, almost timid-looking man who used to appear from nowhere in particular, and stand inconspicuously in a corner watching work on the set. Later I learned to prize his judgment of a picture. He had a rare sense of human values which disregarded superficial matters and went right to the elemental. Having studied and analyzed the reactions of his audiences ever since his penny-arcade and nickelodeon days,

he had a remarkable, instinctive feeling as to how the public would react to a given situation or an idea. If there was a weak spot in motivation or characterization, he had an uncanny ability to put his finger right on that spot. Having been born as one of the people, without cultural advantages, and having educated himself and worked his way up to a dominant position in the world of entertainment, he never lost his basic point of view, his sense of what the mass really liked and responded to.

From the time he withdrew from the fur trade and set up his first penny-arcade, he stood for progress; he felt sure that the public wanted better pictures and would respond to every advance in taste, in craft and in artistry. He founded his whole career on that belief, and determined to stand for the best that could be achieved in the new art, and although his function was executive rather than creative, his allegiance to high standards never wavered. Through all the horrid mess of politics, business attacks and counterattacks, the fight for power, the plots of rival leaders to upset him, and the eternal struggle to prevent Wall Street from interfering in studio matters, he kept his integrity unsullied and never once lost sight of his ultimate goal: to establish the new art and the new industry on solid foundations which would secure their rise to great heights.

It was an interesting fact that, despite the studio custom of calling everyone by his first name, a custom particularly observed in the case of enemies or those whose scalps were soon to adorn some chief's war-bonnet, Mr. Zukor always remained *Mister* Zukor. The rest of us were "Cecil" and "Jesse," "Sam" and "Bill," but only on rare and completely informal occasions have I ever heard the soft-voiced little man addressed as "Adolph," although he was not much older than we were. It may have been his shy reserve which

accounted for this, or it may have been a certain aura which surrounds a born leader whose mind is never far away from his work. But history records that Adolph Zukor's quiet methods and firm hand kept his company, which now included our company, for many years at the front of the procession. It is quite possible that the tremendous Paramount Building, rising as a landmark on Times Square and bearing a bronze tablet inscribed to this picture pioneer, is not merely a monument but a milestone.

While these larger developments were taking place, I was finding the more intimate problems of picture-making quite enough to occupy my own time. It soon became obvious that if I expected to make the number of pictures required of me, someone else would have to write them, as writing a shooting-script had already become a full-time job. Under these circumstances, I enlisted the services of one or two of my ex-associates in the scenario department, who were now, of course, under the jurisdiction of the new department head. But, alas! my own fight for the author's integrity now turned out to be a boomerang. Under the very rules which I had fought so hard to establish, I had to yield to the head of the department whenever we could not agree on a point of writing or construction. This was most annoying. Theoretically I believed in these rules but, in practice, I found bondage no less unpleasant because I had myself set up the bars which held me. In this dilemma there was nothing for me to do but adopt the same adverse attitude which I had so heartily condemned in other directors when I was head of the writing department.

When two perfectly sincere men disagree on a story point there is absolutely no way of proving either one to be right. That is why a motion picture, like any other creative work, should be under the authority of one man. When I was a

writer, I thought the man in charge should be the writer; as a director I saw that the director was the proper person to have the last word. Several times later, when I officiated as supervisor, it was easy for me to see why the supervisor was, after all, in the best possible position to make ultimate decisions.

A mathematical comparison of these three personal equations makes it difficult to escape the conclusion that I rather fancied myself as an arbiter of disputed questions of dramatic value. Looking back carefully over the past, and after studious analysis, I find myself in no position to deny this. But inner conviction is the mother of good drama. From the standpoint of effectiveness on stage or screen, it is better to be wrong and carry the matter through with sincerity than to vacillate or compromise and thus lose that integrity which alone gives the breath of life to your puppets.

One of the worst pictures I ever saw was a great success simply because the people who made it believed what they were doing to such an extent that the audience came to believe it with them. I do not mean to say that belief, in itself, is sufficient: lunatic asylums are full of people who believe without justification; but if there is any material at all to work on, belief in it can do wonders, and even the poor chap in the asylum who thinks he is Napoleon can convince an occasional audience, certainly to a greater degree than the man who doesn't know *who* he is.

Authority over the making of a motion picture must, therefore, be a matter of individual capability rather than of official position. Each of us believes in his soul that he is best qualified to decide the values and guide the destiny of our collaborative work. Which of us actually is, can only be determined by trial, error and experience. The job of being responsible for a picture is not unlike that of a professional

prophet: time alone can prove his value, and no ties of blood or of affection can fit a man for this delicate work, although much money has been lost in various attempts to prove the contrary.

There was the case, for instance, of Frank Borzage, one of the best and most experienced directors in Hollywood. In 1931 Frank had made a couple of pictures which had not done what was expected of them at the box office. He had been used to running his own show, and the sudden wave of executive domination of the artistic field, which reached its height at about this time, had not helped him in his work. Artistic creation is difficult enough at any time, but, to a sensitive director like Borzage, it becomes well-nigh impossible when performed under the critical eye of a supervisor with full power to interfere and little ability to help.

Frank had one more picture to make under his contract and the rumor had already spread, with the speed that such rumors can spread only in Hollywood, that, after this picture, the Company would not take up its option. "He's through," they said. "He's been slipping. Look at his last two pictures."

This, by the way, is typical of the Hollywood attitude: a man is only as good as his latest picture. He may have made twenty highly successful films in the past, but they are completely forgotten if his most recent effort has turned out badly. Nor does it matter that his failure may have been because of a story which he protested against but finally made against his judgment, rather than be a trouble-maker by refusing to carry out the executive's wishes. Loyalty of this sort usually results in a bad picture for which the director alone is blamed. If he is sufficiently loyal he may soon find himself out of a job. I have known this to happen more than once, but I have yet to see any executive rushing

forward to assume blame which a complete history of the case would place squarely upon his shoulders.

Borzage had acquired the screen rights of a book which he believed to be fine picture material and which he wanted to make according to his own ideas, without assistance from the eight or ten master-minds who usually sat in clinical conference over each film in the making, like eight or ten cooks, each seasoning the broth according to his own taste. The high priests of the studio were dubious about the story, particularly if they were not to be allowed to "save it"; but because Frank was a good fellow and the film was bound to be a flop anyhow, and would probably be his last, they finally consented to let him alone; he was given full opportunity and lots of rope to hang himself. Poor old Frank!

So Mr. Borzage quietly took his cast to distant and unobserved corners of the studio and turned out the picture called "Bad Girl," which made a sensational hit, not only because of the story but also because of the magnificent and original way in which it was directed.

It is also typical of Hollywood that as soon as the picture was released, Mr. Borzage at once stepped back into his rightful place among the front-rank directors.

All of which merely indicates that when a man is creating, either artistically or biologically, even the most helpful, critical observation is not necessarily an aid to conception.

CHAPTER X

SHORTLY after Mr. Zukor had merged our company with his, and long feature films had become firmly established as the basis of the whole industry, America entered the World War; and Hollywood, like the rest of the country, became a mass of fervent patriots. Never before had the services and personalities of our well-known actors been so much in demand as when they were called upon to help various groups organized for war work. Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin dropped their work and toured the country, selling Liberty bonds. Their efforts met with remarkable success and demonstrated that our people will rise to great heights of patriotic sacrifice when persuaded by one of their favorite entertainers. President Wilson had, it is true, urged the whole population to "give until it hurts," but it took the emotional pleading of "Little Mary" to bring home the bacon; under the influence of her charm giving didn't hurt so much.

All women of the studio world, non-professional as well as professional, put on nurse's garb and attended instructional meetings where they rolled bandages and made surgical dressings. At home they knit socks and sweaters, and deprived themselves, their children and their husbands of sugar.

On the day war was declared our studio organized itself into a military company, and at night the stages rang with marching feet. We were accepted by the state as an official unit of the "Home Guard," and were technically under the

jurisdiction of the National Guard. Several of us had had military training and officered the company, which drilled three nights a week for the whole period of the war. We were equipped with uniforms, rifles, two machine guns, field telephone, searchlights—in fact, everything except experience. We included about a hundred and fifty able-bodied men and quite a few who were not so able-bodied but whose spirit demanded that they be included. It was very democratic; officers by day were privates at night, and it was quite refreshing to hear an assistant property boy barking orders at his director while teaching him the manual of arms. It was even more refreshing to note that military discipline at night in no way interfered with studio discipline by day, superiors and subordinates cheerfully exchanged places with a facility and alacrity which I rejoice to think is distinctively American.

C. B., having been educated at Pennsylvania Military College, and being the prime mover in organizing our company, became Captain, which was as high as our rankings went, while I drew the laborious, generally thankless and friendless position of top sergeant.

Every other Sunday the whole outfit piled into studio cars and went out to the ranch for field drill and machine-gun practice. There we made heroic efforts to learn how to use the various expensive and extremely dangerous implements of war we had acquired. The ranch was just as hot and no less dusty than it had been when I made my debut in "The Rose of the Rancho" some three years before, but it was inspiring to see old troupers like James Neil and Theodore Roberts, the latter over sixty years of age, carrying their rifles along with the younger men, sweat running down their faces, Theodore's color changing from a healthy

red to a deeply mottled purple, but his face set in grim determination to drop in his tracks rather than quit.

Our ranks were constantly being depleted as members left us to join the army, so that we always had plenty of green replacement material to work on. But we were doing some good after all, for our boys, having had a certain amount of training, were snapped up by the regular army top sergeants who were badly in need of trained men for non-commissioned officers. Of the hundred and five men who went from our company into the army every single one soon wore chevrons or shoulderstraps.

It was on a particularly hot Sabbath that our three platoons stood stiffly at attention in the blistering sun while our Captain received the new silken company colors which were presented to him by Mary Pickford. She looked adorable in a semi-military costume and made a touching little speech which moved us all deeply but which, unfortunately, I have forgotten. C. B. was so affected by the poignancy of the occasion that he had difficulty in controlling his voice to reply. He and the group of notables surrounding him were in the shadow of a clump of trees, the only spot of shade in the vicinity. I stood with the boys at my appointed post in the sun. As the speeches went on and the company stood like graven images, I could feel the emotional tension which held them; they were all trained in drama and this was a dramatic moment in real life, with the bloody curtain of war behind it. I was proud of their immobility; they looked like veterans. I had a warm glow of pride, too, for my brother, who was phrasing so simply and manfully the patriotic emotion we all were feeling. How glorious it was to die for one's country, for the entire world, in fact, for this was a holy war; it would end all wars forever and the whole human race would organize itself into democratic

groups, each country striving to outdo all the others in helpful, friendly co-operation. No more tyrants, whether imperial or dictatorial; no more racial hatreds nor jealous wranglings over international trade; the world was going to be made safe for brotherly love if we had to kill every damned inhabitant of Central Europe.

As I reached this point of spiritual exaltation, I noticed a large, greenheaded fly which swept suddenly out of the sky, like an enemy plane, and hung, suspended in air, about a foot in front of my perspiring face. I knew this particular breed of fly; it was the great man-eating horsefly of the Western plains, and its bite left nothing to the imagination. Silent, motionless and stern I stood, the perfect embodiment of relentless, American, military determination. The fly was equally motionless, except for the quiver of its wings, but as its horrid greenish eyes met mine I could see that its soul was completely Germanic. This was its chance to strike a telling blow for the Fatherland. We exchanged a long look of mutual hatred, and then I could feel its cruel glance concentrate upon my nose, the tip of which was obviously his nearest landing-place.

My brother was reaching the most impressive part of his address, but his voice sounded very far away and I no longer heard the words. The fly was imperceptibly drawing nearer to its goal. What to do? If I raised my hand to repel the noxious insect I would destroy the whole military picture. I remembered my previous prayers and exhortations to the company to let no human weakness, no matter how urgent, betray them into any movement which would mar the solemn dignity of the occasion; for the honor of our organization—yea, of the nation itself—we must stand as though hewn from granite. Any motion on my part, therefore, meant personal, organizational, national disgrace.

I was now cross-eyed from watching the fly, which had at last effected a perfect six-point landing and was quietly examining its new picnic ground pore by pore.

"Kamarad," I breathed, but my plea fell upon deaf, brutish ears. I could feel that there were going to be atrocities. Well—it was my bit for God and Country. Hoping against hope for deliverance, I protruded my lower lip and blew a strong current of warm air directly upward. This seemed to please the fly, which cocked an evil eye at me and then proceeded, with its hind legs, to remove the dust of travel from its face; an action which, aside from the implied insult, gave me a horrible desire to sneeze. As this was unthinkable I resorted to making funny faces, which I sincerely trust were not mistaken for critical comment on the patriotic speech to which I was supposed to be listening. The strenuous action of my facial muscles evidently warned the fly that it had better do its vile work and be off. It did, and was; and as C. B. finished with a stirring appeal for self-sacrifice and national devotion, no one thought it unmanly of me that my eyes were filled with tears.

The great war had begun just a few weeks before I came to Hollywood, and through its first three years the European struggle had never ceased to occupy the mind of the American public; and yet, in contradiction to custom, very few pictures had dealt with the subject. This was undoubtedly part of a general effort to preserve our neutrality; American thought was strongly in sympathy with the Allies, but the State Department was urgently advising the industry to avoid making pictures which might be construed as unfriendly to governments with which we were technically at peace. It was the old case of nobody wanting to be the villain, but this time under peculiarly sensitive conditions. Nevertheless, as relations between the United States and

Germany became more and more strained, the situation was more than picture-producers could bear, and in 1916 Tom Ince frightened the country almost to death with a picture called "Civilization," which showed how a foreign country, very similar to Germany, had perfected her secret organization over here and, at the proper moment, mobilized millions of pseudo-Americans, uniformed and armed, who held the land as a dominion of the Central European Power.

The people went for this film with avidity; went and shuddered and began casting suspicious glances at life-long friends who were unfortunate enough to have European connections. In the same year Herbert Brenon produced "War Brides," with Alla Nazimova as the chief sufferer; and my brother, who was making "Joan the Woman" out of Joan of Arc, with Geraldine Farrar, tied his story to the present by making Wally Reid a young American soldier who, in a previous incarnation, had helped deliver Joan to the English and was now making up for it by giving his life for France. In spite of exceptions like these, the war, as screen material, was generally avoided.

Even after we joined the belligerent nations, war pictures still occupied a position far below the relative importance of the subject in public thought. It was no longer a question of neutrality, but the tremendously large number of German-Americans all over the country, while perfectly loyal to the United States, naturally didn't care to see their German relatives pictured as cruel beasts without souls or any human emotions. In spite of much English-born propaganda, which described the invading German soldiers playfully cutting off the hands of Belgian children and told, with relish, how the "Huns" loaded dead bodies of their own men into freight cars to be delivered to soap-factories, American people, as a whole, refused to believe that a nation who had

sent us so many of our finest citizens could, in one fell swoop, turn into a race unlike anything human. As a result, such war pictures as were made showed a surprising fairness in depicting our opponents: another proof that a medium as broadly human as the motion picture must show its characters in something like true colors or the whole work becomes utterly unbelievable and thus fails even as propaganda. But on the whole, the war pictures we made during the war were not particularly successful, which we attributed to the fact that our people were too close to the tragedy in real life to want any part of it as entertainment. They wanted the screen to help them forget their troubles, not to harrow them by depicting the dangers their sons, husbands, sweethearts and brothers were facing.

In 1918 the irrepressible Charlie Chaplin came through with "Shoulder Arms," at which the whole world laughed, but the cycle of real war pictures did not start until wounds had had a chance to heal and memories to soften. Then, in 1925, "The Big Parade" showed that we were far enough away from the war to feel its human values more truly. The tremendous success of this picture, which made Jack Gilbert a star, was followed in 1926 by "What Price Glory," which caused all the censors in the country to look under their beds every night, but which the public demanded with a voice too loud to be denied. In 1927 "Wings" added itself to the roster of great war pictures; and finally, in 1930, after the coming of sound on the screen, "All Quiet on the Western Front" proved that the motion picture, in spite of war, hate and prejudice, had once more evidenced its power to show all men as brothers.

Hollywood in 1917, however, was far too wrought up emotionally to indulge in any flights of philosophical thought. We were in the war, and in wartime it becomes the

people's duty to believe whatever the politicians tell them to believe. Any effort to think for yourself becomes an act of disloyalty, if not of downright treason. If you try to understand the enemy's point of view in order to oppose it with some intelligence, your friends begin to look at you askance, and the rumor soon gets around that you are probably a secret agent for the other side. It is almost certain that sufficient thinking, if indulged in by the people of both sides, would prevent any war, but the minute international situations become tense each country launches its campaign of propaganda, in which truth is much rarer than fiction and all loyal citizens dutifully regiment their thoughts. Of course, this may be wise; people who stop to think in a crisis are more than likely to be killed by those who don't.

Hollywood, at any rate, was intensely loyal, which made it hard for the large foreign element which had already been attracted to the studios, particularly those whose names had a Germanic origin. The Japanese question having been for some time an economic problem in California, it was most disappointing to a large number of our citizens that Japan was our ally and not our enemy; it complicated things so.

As Los Angeles was near the Mexican border, it was naturally supposed to be a great spy-center with headquarters below the line, and we were all terribly excited to think that, at any moment, vast German hordes might come sweeping up from Mexico, and thousands of submarines suddenly emerge from the quiet Pacific. There was ever-present tension in the air, which gave us a thrilling sense of immediate danger, and practically the whole population began to devote itself to the snappy task of catching spies. Hundreds of citizens bore little white cards attesting that they were volunteer agents of the Department of Justice. It

William deMille directing Claire Adams in "Men and Women," 1925.

Thomas Meighan and Kathlyn Williams in "Conrad in Quest of His Youth," 1920.

was seldom necessary to see the cards; you could identify the bearers by their piercing eyes which seemed to glance at you so casually, but which went right through you and missed nothing. A certain firm look about the mouth, too, indicated the relentless hunter of men. They were all over the place and always busy. If a light burned late at night it might be foul work and had to be investigated. If a householder destroyed papers in his back-yard incinerator he was probably getting rid of evidence. One little grocery store proprietor was reported to have burnt loaves of bread in a bonfire behind his store as part of a diabolical plot to starve the country into submission. Upon inquiry it developed that he had indeed burnt some loaves of bread for the very good reason that they were moldy. Some long, suspicious boxes were delivered (by the regular express company) at the home of a resident whose name began with "von." Immediately the whisper went around: "Guns! He's got a cellar full of guns and ammunition." Alas, there was naught in the cellar save cases of very excellent German wine. But our quiet, friendly little Hollywood had been turned into a bubbling center of espionage and counter-espionage. There were, no doubt, a few real spies in Hollywood during the war, but they never seemed to operate quite as openly as the unfortunate citizens under suspicion; they committed no overt acts in their back yards; they never had contraband goods delivered to their homes by daylight; they made no disloyal remarks, nor did they treat the flag with disrespect. They did their work quietly and without ostentation, and I feel quite sure that each of them carried a little white card from the Department of Justice.

My brother was quite above suspicion, but I, alackaday! was thought by some people to have "radical" tendencies, firstly, because I seldom voted the Republican ticket, and

secondly, because my belief was known that the people of a state have certain inalienable rights in its natural resources. This, of course, was dangerous doctrine to hold in California, where so many of its most influential citizens were busily engaged in selling the natural resources of the state to its inhabitants. To make matters worse, Southern California had begun to be a rallying ground for various elements of social reform, and its infinitesimal Democratic majority in 1916 had sent Mr. Wilson to the White House much against the wishes and organized efforts of our "best people." As soon as war was declared, it was understood by California conservatives that all radical elements of our country were working hard for Germany, whose long history of individual liberty, high wages, freedom of thought and speech and emancipation from any privileged class made her an ideal for which any American radical would be proud to die.

Such was the general state of the public mind when, one day, I was summoned to C. B.'s office. He was sitting behind his massive desk, the top of which had already begun to suggest a bargain counter at the Metropolitan Museum. The beamed and vaulted ceiling, the Gothic stained-glass windows admitting a dim religious light, the heavy old-English furniture, the floor covered with skins of polar bears, Kodiak bears, Siberian wolves, timber wolves and a buffalo, always made me uncertain whether I was entering Westminster Abbey or the sitting room of Eric the Red. On one side of the Gothic portal stood the battle flag which Mary had given our company; on the other a stand of studio-made old French colors which had been carried to victory in "Joan the Woman."

Two men were sitting in the shadows, outside the circle of light which played upon the desk-top. As I approached

I saw that they were both strangers, and my trained power of observation told me at once that one was a large man, the other somewhat smaller. There was a naughty twinkle in the Director-General's eye.

"Come in, Bill, come in," he said, as if he were enjoying a secret joke. "These gentlemen represent Washington; it seems you've been reported as a dangerous radical and I thought they'd better give you the third degree in here. Gentlemen, my brother."

I bowed gravely; if it was to be a firing squad they should see how a patriot could die.

"Mr. deMille," said the big one, "your name is on a list of people who were invited to meet William Z. Foster on his last visit here."

"That's right," I said meekly. "I was asked to meet him."

A cruel smile touched for an instant the thin lips of my inquisitor: "You know, of course, that Foster is a Communist?"

"I suspected he was," I admitted, "from what I've read."

"Why were *you* asked to meet him?"

"I suppose to hear his views."

"Do you agree with those views?"

"Probably not," I faltered, "but I haven't heard them yet. You see, I didn't go to the meeting."

"Why not?" He was trying to trap me; I could feel it.

"There wasn't any meeting," I said simply.

"If there had been, you would have gone?" Curse the man's cleverness! There was no eluding him; twist and turn as I might, his searching questions were going to lay bare my innermost thoughts.

"Would you?" he repeated.

It was useless. "Yes," I said desperately, "I would."

He nodded with satisfaction; I was no match for him. I

thought of Nathan Hale, of Major André, even of Mata Hari; they were good spies too. Well, we all had to be caught sooner or later.

"How did you know about the meeting?" the stern, relentless voice went on.

"I told you—I was asked to go."

"Who asked you?"

Oh God! He was asking me to "squeal"; to involve a friend. Should I defy him and be led to the Bastille for friendship's sake? Then I thought of my oath to the Government; of my many oaths to the Government. During the past few months, every time I had tried to do anything for the Government I had been required to take a new oath to protect it, to help it, to serve it, to bear arms for it, to die for it—no honeymoon bride had ever asked for more protestations of devotion. And like the adoring but tiring bridegroom I had sworn: "Of course I love you, dear"; "Of course I will protect you, darling"; "Of course I will die for you, my sweet." And now I was committed; I had no choice.

"Who asked you to this meeting?"

I felt like a stool pigeon, but answered, "Charlie Chaplin."

A look of satisfaction passed between the two men; they had probably known all the time; it would have gone ill with me had I lied.

"Is Chaplin a Communist?" asked the big one.

Maybe I could throw them off the scent. "He's an Englishman," I said helpfully.

"Is he a Communist?"

"Well—" I hesitated, "I've heard him say he was a Socialist, but when I asked him what a Socialist was he didn't seem quite sure. Anyway, if he starts through the

country with fire and sword he'll have to burn up an awful lot of his own property."

"Why wasn't the meeting held?"

"It wasn't a 'meeting,' " I answered. "It was to be just a social party at Charlie's house, but he had to go on the road to sell Liberty bonds for the Government."

"I see," said the big one, nodding profoundly.

The Director-General, who, up to this time, had been smirking at me from behind the bowl of an enormous pipe, now decided to throw the full force of his well-known respectability behind me: "If Bill is a Communist," he put in reassuringly, "it must have happened since last night. Up to that time, gentlemen, I can vouch for him."

The atmosphere grew perceptibly brighter; I seemed to hear footsteps of the man bearing the Governor's pardon. Soon iron bolts would clang, and I would be free to go out once more into the blessed sunlight. But no; the little one now rose and faced me.

"Mr. deMille," he began, "you are president of the Loyalty League, I believe."

I assented. The Loyalty League was a citizens' organization which met every Monday night to find out and discuss how best to co-operate with the Government. I usually presided.

"It was reported," the little one went on, "that you stated on the platform that you would like to see the milk we are giving to Belgian children go to feed the Germans. Is that true?"

"Well—not quite the way you put it."

"Well—what did you say then?"

"Well—the meeting was discussing Belgian relief, and I was appealing for funds to supply milk for Belgian babies

who need it badly. One woman was much perturbed for fear that some of this milk might be diverted into the mouths of German babies. She asked me if I could assure her that such would not be the case. I told her that I could not. She said she was so patriotic that she didn't feel like contributing if one drop of that milk might find its way into a German baby. I then told her that, as far as I was concerned, babies were just babies; they had no nationality until they had acquired enough intelligence to shoot at their neighbors; that, for my part, I could still salute Old Glory with a clear conscience, even if a few starving German babies got some of the milk intended for starving Belgian babies. I added that, anyhow, it was Mr. Hoover's job to see that German babies starved and Belgian babies didn't, and that we shouldn't worry our pretty heads about it. She asked if I thought that my attitude was patriotic and I closed the debate by saying that what I didn't know about patriotism I was willing to learn, but that no baby in the world was an enemy of mine unless he was an American baby who insisted upon being walked at three o'clock in the morning. That is what actually happened, gentlemen, and if it be treason, make the most of it."

Although the climax of this oration was just a trifle borrowed, I could see that it had been effective. In fact, both the Government bloodhounds were smiling.

"Oh I guess you're a loyal American," said the little one. "We just had to make sure, that's all."

"But," added the big one, "we heard that you're always criticizing the Government."

"I have done so in the past," I said. "After all, it's my Government; why shouldn't I criticize it? Why do we vote every year or so?—Just to say, 'Well done, thou good and faithful public servants'?"

"But we have to be careful in wartimes," said the big one; his voice was now fatherly, almost caressing.

"Oh I'm careful all right," I retorted. "I don't mind parking my intelligence for the period of the war, but I don't want to abandon it completely. A man can be perfectly willing to die for his country without believing all its customs and institutions to be perfect. Look at all the men who have died to protect women whom they knew to be far from perfect. As a matter of fact, women who are perfect seldom have to be died for."

"Ah!" said the Director-General dryly, "I see you've never met a perfect woman."

This remark so delighted the gentlemen from Washington that I felt it wise to join in the ensuing laughter, under cover of which I made my escape.

Hollywood has changed since then. Nowadays a "Socialist," at least among the writers, has been defined as one who draws more than two thousand dollars a week; while a "Red," no matter what his salary, is anyone who disagrees out loud with certain important producers. This may be the reason why there are, today, so few "Reds" in Hollywood.

Probably the greatest actual danger I experienced during the war was my first ride in an airplane with my brother as aviator. Immediately after the American declaration of war C. B. had decided to join the army "over there." He was quite willing to start at the bottom, as a Captain, and work his way up, so he had been taking lessons in aviation from Al Wilson at Culver City. Al was about as good a flyingman as the times afforded, but aviation was not only in its infancy but had proved to be a dangerous and most unreliable infant.

For weeks C. B.'s conversation had been full of "nosedives," "tail-spins" and "Immelmann loops," and I had ob-

served him at odd moments manipulating an imaginary stick in an imaginary plane, bringing it out of an imaginary fall to an imaginary safe landing. Just to watch him gave me imaginary heart failure.

Late one afternoon he hailed me, helmet and goggles in his hand: "Hi Bill, come on and I'll give you a thrill."

"What sort of thrill?" I asked with deep suspicion.

His eyes were snapping: "You've never been up in the air, have you?"

"No, not yet," I said. "You see, when I was very young I read about the sad fate of Icarus; it made quite an impression on me."

"Pooh!" said he. "Come on, you're going to be the first man I've ever taken up."

"Gee whiz! some honor," I murmured feebly. "But suppose I should also turn out to be the last man you'd ever taken up?"

"Well," he said in his quaintly philosophical way, "think of all the years of hard work that'll save you."

"But I like hard work; sometimes I can scarcely get enough—besides didn't you tell me only two days ago that you'd just made your first solo flight?"

"Sure," he said jauntily, "but I've been up twice since then; I've had over an hour altogether and no trouble yet."

"My! My! think of that: a whole hour in the air alone and not a single accident! How does it feel to be an old veteran like the Wright brothers? I suppose it seems sort of strange to be walking around on the ground."

He looked at me sharply: "What's the matter, Bill? Are you scared to go up with me?"

If I told him the truth it would hurt his pride. He was so full of joy in his achievement I couldn't bear to dampen it;

and yet I hated to lie to him, so I just said: "Scared! Ha-ha," in rather a hollow tone.

"Come on then," he ordered, starting for the gate; "you'll love it, once you get used to it."

I hoped so, but I had my doubts. As he drove me to the field, I could see he was "air-minded." His driving had acquired a certain disregard for ruts and bumps in the road. He felt himself an eagle, and had no time for, or patience with, mere terrestrial obstacles. He left the road and followed what looked like an Indian trail across the fields, merely remarking that it was shorter. The car, however, was well built, and when we reached the flying field it had, so far as I could observe, shaken off no essential parts.

We left the car, and as we strode over to the hangar I could see C. B.'s jaw set and could tell by the way he trod the soil that he was no longer in California; he was in France and we were going up to meet an enemy plane. Well, that was quite all right with me: I didn't think an enemy plane could add much to our danger.

Al Wilson and his mechanic were warming up the engine and C. B., like a well-trained aviator, looked over the machine carefully, gravely testing an occasional strut and feeling the wings and rudder to make sure they were firmly attached to the body. He was taking no chances; if we crashed it would be in spite of every precaution which his long experience suggested.

"She sounds pretty sweet, Al," he remarked, so that I might be sure his expert ear was analyzing the performance of each separate cylinder.

"Yes, sir," said Al, "she's in fine shape."

I was glad they thought so. She was a little bit of a thing

with a tiny open cockpit just big enough for two people to squeeze in, one behind the other. The engine was making a noise like a battery of machine-guns and the poor plane quivered as if thoroughly frightened. I knew exactly how she felt.

Meanwhile the boys had encased me in a leather coat, a helmet and goggles. I was glad of the goggles; somehow I felt that they made me look brave.

Al reached inside the cockpit, touched some gadget and the engine doubled its efforts. It sounded so "sweet" that conversation became largely visual. C. B. put his head close to mine and waved his hand. "Get in, Bill," he screamed. I nodded and climbed carefully over the side into the front seat. I had never been in a plane before, and I noticed, with some relief, that the seats were well padded and the sides of the cockpit were breast-high. It would be difficult to fall out, even without the heavy strap which bound me to the machine and made me shudder with it.

C. B. had taken his place. He, too, touched something and the engine began to show what it really could do. I had thought it was deafening before, but I was mistaken; up to now it had only been whispering. We began to move faster and faster over the bumpy ground and headed right for a long line of eucalyptus trees at the end of the field. After a couple of preliminary hops, each of which would easily have cut me in two had my strap been a trifle narrower, the plane finally wrenched itself free of the ground and we were in the air, but still heading for the trees which seemed to grow taller as we approached. It was most discouraging that every time we rose high enough to look as if we would go safely over the barrier, the plane would suddenly drop twenty or thirty feet and we'd have to do our hard work all over again. As we actually reached the trees

I found myself trying to lift the plane over them. This must have done some good, because we did clear them, though I suspect our wheels were full of eucalyptus leaves. I screwed around in my strap to see if C. B. was still there. He was, and as he smiled at me he made a debonair gesture which said: "There, you see, we missed 'em."

We were now climbing rapidly and, as Hollywood and the surrounding country began to spread out beneath us, I almost began to enjoy the trip. We had passed over the studio, which proved to be much smaller than I had supposed, and I could just identify the roofs of our two houses when I realized that, at this moment, both the deMille eggs were in one basket and that the basket was trying to shake itself to pieces a mile up in the air. What was the use of our being executors of each other's wills? And if I landed right in my own house after passing through the roof, would the critics yell "coincidence"?

Suddenly the plane stood on its ear, and as I grasped the two sides I saw with interest that there was nothing between me and the ground but lots of marvelous California air. The plane was somewhere northeast of me; I could feel it with my feet, but no law of gravity seemed to attract me to it; and I had thought in my ignorance it would be hard to fall out. I was waiting, in vain, for all the events of my past life to pass before me in an instant, when we quickly straightened out and once more the good little boat was beneath me. Breathing rapidly, I screwed around again to look at the daring pilot. There he was, grinning at me and making a graceful, swanlike gesture with his hand to indicate that we had made a "right bank."

My stiffened lips smiled back at him and I nodded understandingly to show that I realized full well that we had indeed made a "right bank."

We were now headed back toward the field and no son ever longed more for his mother than I longed for Mother Earth. All at once the plane, as if in answer to my longing, pointed its nose directly at Mother Earth and, with the engine roaring, approached the ground at a speed which, C. B. confided to me later, was probably six hundred miles an hour. This was the end—and so little time to think about it.

My heart sank, but the plane easily passed it and lodged it firmly in my throat. Nothing but the jar of landing would ever displace it. I started to say, "Now I lay me," but stopped; the words sounded ominous and, besides, things were bad enough as they were; there was no use putting ideas into God's head. Just as I thought we were actually hitting the ground the plane leveled herself out with a bump which almost tore her wings off and nearly drove me through her bottom. She quivered, trembled and did everything but squeal, before she resumed her horizontal course.

Having been halfway to heaven, it took me a moment to return. Once more I twisted about to regard, with some awe, the Ajax who was defying the gods with such nonchalance. This time his smile was filled with triumph. Being a master of pantomime he made a "duck's-head" of his fingers, placed them on the tip of his nose and thence, in a perfect curve, pointed them earthward. This was to explain that we had made a "nose-dive." I nodded weakly to show I understood that we absolutely had.

A moment later we made a fair, two-point landing which ultimately acquired its third point. As C. B. took off his helmet and goggles he was positively beaming. I suppose my own face radiated some of the joy I felt as my feet pressed the soil I had missed so acutely.

"Well, Bill," said C. B., "how'd you like it?"

"Great!" I said, "great! It's surprising."

"I thought you'd like it," said C. B.

But the real surprise of the day came when I reached home and looked in the mirror. My hair was still brown.

CHAPTER XI

THE war, however much it affected our thoughts and our extra-studio activities as well as our private lives, had very little effect on studio matters themselves, or the general progress of pictures. The show had to go on, the art had to grow, and the audience was realizing more and more that, in war or in peace, the motion picture was becoming increasingly valuable as an expression of national thought, a reflection of every phase of American life and, as far as was commercially safe, a presentation of problems big enough to be of universal importance.

Looking back over the war and post-war periods, I seem to see a series of scenes dissolving into one another like the montage-shots of a modern movie. Many faces flit across memory's screen, some alive and famous, some dead and hardly remembered, and—greatest tragedy of all—some still alive but forgotten. Many incidents recall themselves, not a few tragic but more of them comic, as the cavalcade of the motion picture, step by step, plodded its way through the years toward its present position of world influence and its undoubted but unknown future of artistic power.

There was that day on the ranch when C. B. was making a picture called "The Captive," a story of war in the Balkans, with Blanche Sweet in the leading role. A group of our boys dressed in Central-European uniforms were to break down, with their rifle-butts, the door of a hut which contained the heroine.

"Now boys," directed C. B., "I've had that door made

strong so it'll take some real breaking in. We'll only do it once, and there won't be any fake about it, so go after it hard."

The boys nodded understandingly and gripped their guns as the director took his place under the cameras. A moment later he gave the word to go. With wild yells the little band rushed at the door and, finding it barred, started to batter it down. As the first steel-shod butts crashed against the wood a shot rang out, and one of our regular cowboys, big, good-natured Bob Fleming in the second rank, quietly sank to the ground and died, shot through the head.

Somehow, one rifle had contained a cartridge, although all the guns were supposed to be unloaded, and the poor lad who wielded that gun had not known enough to check on his weapon before going into action. The property boys all swore that they had examined every piece before handing it out. How that one cartridge came to be in the chamber never was discovered, but Bob was dead, the first fatal accident we had experienced. Many times he had taken chances and done dangerous feats "for the good of the picture," only to be, at last, the victim of someone's carelessness. It was a sad group which returned early to the studio that afternoon. But the show had to go on and the scene was made the following day. Nerve-racking, of course, but that's pictures.

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Another day, another scene and a different cast of characters comes to mind. This time I was directing a picture called "The Clown," which starred Victor Moore long before he made history as the unforgettable Vice-President Throttlebottom.

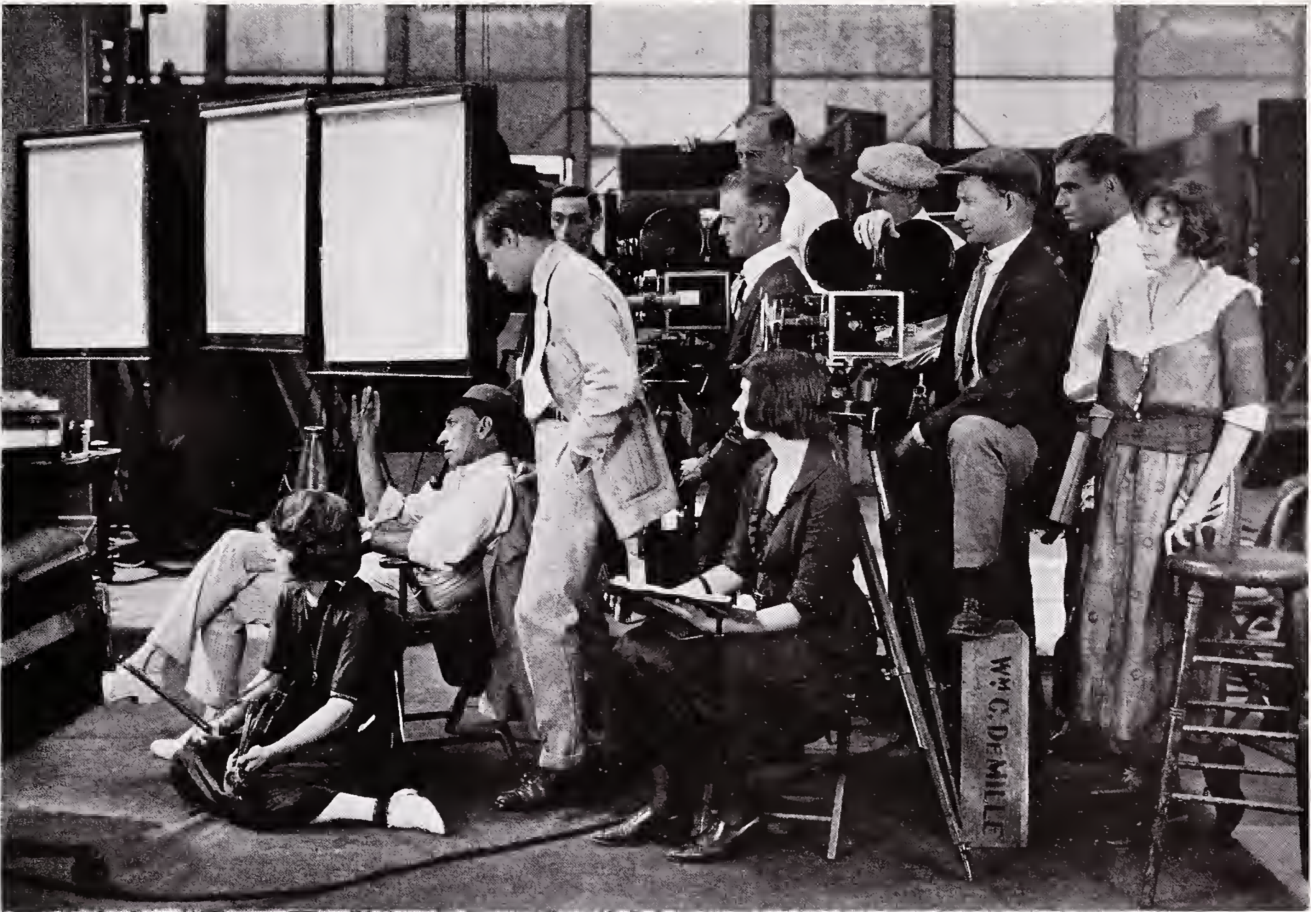
Victor was new to pictures, but he was eager and willing

to learn the game, and working with him was a delight. His part was that of a circus clown who falls deeply and silently in love with Florence, a beautiful girl who, alas! has given her heart, and a bit more, to a young and penniless prospector played by Tom Forman. Tom is reported to have died in the desert, and Florence, much to her chagrin, finds that her clandestine love promises to have illegitimate results. This matter was, of course, handled so delicately that the refined portion of the audience could attribute her desperate grief entirely to her lost romance plus perhaps just a touch of acute indigestion.

At any rate, she determines to kill herself by drowning in the lake which adjoins her father's home. Victor sees her and plunges to the rescue, carrying her, unconscious, from the water; this was the scene to be shot on this particular day. From a director's point of view the thrill lay in the fact that Victor could swim only a very little, and Florence not at all.

I had discussed this difficulty with them, but Victor felt sure his aquatic power would be sufficient, and Florence wanted to play the part so much she would have gone through fire as well as water rather than lose the chance. Florence was a sturdy blond type; her face was quite beautiful in repose, which was its normal condition. It was moonlike rather than ethereal, and her body was built on Western lines, made to resist hardship and overcome obstacles. Her legs could easily have served a much larger woman, but she was sincere in her work, and in those days sincerity frequently took the place of shapeliness.

"I'm afraid you can't do it, Florence," I said to her. "You've got to walk out into the water, deeper and deeper; it comes to your waist, and you think of your lost love; it comes up to your neck and you think how happy you'll be



William deMille and staff in 1921.

Bebe Daniels in "The World's Applause," 1922.

with him in heaven. The last I see of you is your eyes with a sort of holy joy in them, and then the water covers your head and you're gone."

"Wonderful!" she said. "I'd love to do it."

"But you can't swim a single stroke."

"But I don't have to swim," she pleaded. "All I have to do is stay down there till Victor comes and gets me."

"Yes, that's all you have to do," I agreed, "but you're not going to be awfully comfortable. How long can you hold your breath?"

"Over a minute," she said, proudly. "I timed it; besides, even if I faint it won't hurt the picture."

"All right, you win," I conceded. "My dear girl, if you could act as well as you can troupe, you'd be the Duse of the screen."

She seemed delighted: "Oh, Mr. deMille, you just love to tease me, don't you? What's a doozay?"

"Never mind," I said. "You practice holding your breath."

The place I had chosen for this heroic episode was a large swimming pool on an estate outside of Hollywood. It had natural sloping banks on two sides and concrete walls on the other two. By putting the camera on the concrete wall and shooting toward the natural bank, we obtained a perfect illusion of nature untouched by man. Florence was to wade out toward the camera until she was entirely submerged, which would put the struggle for her life close up, in the deep water directly under our lens. Two of my lads, strong swimmers both, crouched on the wall in bathing suits ready for whatever might happen.

"Boys," I admonished them privately, "this is one of those scenes which can only be done once. We can't rehearse it because the actors won't have strength enough to

go through it twice; so, no matter what you see or hear, don't start after them till I give the word. They've got to look as if they were drowning and something tells me they will. This is one of our punches, and I don't want you pulling them out before I've got my footage. Wait till I yell to you, and then Ed, you take Victor and Tom can have the lady."

This being understood and the actors having had careful and minute instructions, we were ready for the big moment. Victor looked pale but determined, and Florence's knees were shaking a bit as she looked at the deep water, but she was game.

The camera started to turn and Florence appeared in what would ultimately be the moonlight; her blond hair backlighted, making a halo. She did her little scene on the bank and then entered the water. The kid had nerve. Foot by foot she came toward me and as the water rose around her I prayed to all the gods that she wouldn't falter or, worse yet, float. Her dress had been weighted to prevent this, but you never could tell. She was grand. Without losing the mood of the scene she took the last few steps which submerged her. I waved to Victor, and he came tearing into the scene, making what he proudly thought was a dive. At any rate it made a marvelous splash and he started after the sunken heroine while I wondered how her breath was holding out. The camera followed him as he reached the spot and went under to find her. He was gone some time and I felt the two rescuers looking at me, but I shook my head: six or seven seconds sometimes feel like minutes. At last Victor rose to the surface with the half-drowned girl hanging on to him. The breath she had been holding so long escaped in one unromantic "whoosh," but it was a silent

picture so nothing was spoiled. She clung tightly to Victor, who, thus encumbered, couldn't swim a stroke, but tried manfully. They sank and came up again several times and the expressions on their faces were not acting.

It was great stuff—a real drowning scene; no fake about it, and the camera placed to get it all—every detail, each facial contortion. It would make history and put the picture over with a bang. Victor hadn't been able to move the girl a single foot toward shore and kept looking at me appealingly. That was all right too; it would appear on the screen as though he were praying. Florence, poor child, was coughing and struggling and snatching at breath whenever her mouth happened to be above water, which wasn't often.

Finally I felt that the purposes of art had been accomplished: "Cut!" I yelled. "Go get 'em boys," and in less than ten seconds the two thoroughly waterlogged actors were hauled ashore. Victor sank, weakly, on a bench, looking like a saturated sponge as water ran from him in rills and rivulets. "How was it?" he gasped.

"Marvelous, Victor," I said, patting his sodden back. "By gosh, that was real acting."

"Acting, hell!" said Victor. "Couldn't you see I was drowning?"

"Not really?" I soothed. "Why, I thought you were just giving a magnificent performance."

Victor looked mollified. "Well of course I did the best I could with Florence trying to stand on my head."

My eyes sought the leading lady. She was reclining on a very wet blanket drinking straight whisky from a tin cup; streaks of mascara marked the peach bloom of her cheeks, and the hair that had been her halo hung like yellow shoe strings on each side of her face. Her silken dress clung to her like a coat of light blue paint; except for the tinge of

color, you had to look twice to be sure she had it on, but I suspect that everyone looked twice.

"Well, little one," I greeted her, "how's the brave girl?"

She took another gulp of whisky, coughed, and her gorgeous eyes looked up at me as if through seaweed. "I thought Victor was going to hold me up," she said.

"So did Victor," I answered, "but don't worry; everything worked out for the best."

"Was I all right?"

"My dear, you were superb; you may not be an Annette Kellerman, but nobody in the world could have played that scene better; why, it looked just as if you were really drowning."

She smiled contentedly. "I told you I could do it," she said.

I shared her feeling of triumph. We had the scene and both actors were still alive. Not only that, but they'd be ready to work again as soon as they got their breath. I walked over to my cameraman to line up the next scene.

"How was it, Charlie?" I asked him.

"Fine," he said. "Great stuff!"

He didn't smile when he said it. There was a certain furtive feel to him; his manner was that of a man who had just stolen an automobile and was trying to be pleasant about it.

"Did you get it all?" I inquired.

"Well—" He looked decidedly uncomfortable.

"Well—what?" I demanded with strong foreboding.

"I—I stopped when they got in trouble."

"You *stopped;* oh my God! But trouble was what we were shooting for."

Charlie looked miserable: "I thought they were drowning, and I guess I got excited—but I got the first part."

And the scene couldn't be taken again; at least, not that day. Aside from the actors' exhaustion, hair and clothes alone had us stopped. All those lovely, drowning agonies had been played to a dead camera. As if from another world I heard Charlie's plaintive voice repeating: "Sure, I got all the first part."

After all, why kill him? It would only delay the picture and wouldn't give me back my scene. For the first time in my life I understood, completely, the psychology of a Bengal tiger when a juicy, newly-killed antelope is snatched from his jaws.

Charlie regarded me with the dumb, pleading eyes of a spaniel who has just discovered that the man he has bitten is his good, kind master; all he lacked was long, silky ears and a tail to put between his legs.

"Well, Charlie," I said as gently as I could, "I'm glad you got the first part. You deserve a lot of credit for that. I always like a cameraman to get some of the scene; not too much, of course—I can't expect the impossible—but just enough to show that he's co-operative at heart; just those bits which he fancies, or which he thinks the audience might enjoy."

"But I thought—" began Charlie helplessly.

"Of course you did," I interrupted. "That's your long suit, my dear boy, thinking. You oughtn't to be bothered with a camera; no, that sort of work is just for brutish mechanics who tend their machines endlessly, day after day, until their souls and all human emotions are ground out of them. You wouldn't do that, Charlie; you wouldn't keep turning a dull, senseless crank while human beings were suffering. I should hope not; it's against every finer instinct of the sympathetic mind. Suppose we did lose the best damned drowning scene that's ever been in front of a

camera; what of it? Why nothing at all: it's a lot better to know that our hearts are not deadened to human misery. I don't blame you a bit for forgetting you were a cameraman and thinking you were a Red Cross nurse; only sometimes, Charlie, old pal, it does seem unnatural to think of murder as a crime."

"I'm sorry," said Charlie, with some sincerity.

"All right, my lad," I replied, "we'll forget it. Only be thankful you didn't pull this one on C. B.; he would have said unkind things to you."

Charlie started to turn away, but I stopped him. "Just one more thing, Charlie; one little suggestion for the future, so that these family misunderstandings may be avoided."

He eyed me suspiciously. In spite of my gentleness I think he caught a sense of disapproval underlying my words.

"Hereafter," I continued, "whenever I say 'Camera' please try to remember that only one thing in the world is supposed to stop your crank from turning. That one thing is the magic word 'Cut,' spoken by myself. I realize, Charlie, that this is no easy thing I'm asking of you. There will be times when you are cold, hungry and weary and feel your strength ebbing, but somehow you must keep that crank turning. There will be other times when things seem to have gone wrong and that to keep on turning is only wasting your work and, what is more important, your film. Those are the times which will try your soul, my boy, but the crank must keep on going round and round. Not thy will but mine, Charlie, must nerve your arm and keep your hand steady. If the heroine sits on a chair and it unexpectedly collapses, go on turning. If the hero busts his braces and his pants fall down during his big, emotional farewell, go on turning. If, God forbid, I am stricken and fall dead

in the middle of a scene, keep on turning until my successor is duly appointed and says 'Cut.' You see, Charlie," I concluded, "what I mean: the main idea is that you should keep on turning."

The lad looked a trifle dazed, but I believe he got my meaning. "Yes, sir," he said, in a muffled tone, and fled.

I walked over to my star, whose teeth were gently chattering in the warm California sunshine. "Well, Victor," I inquired, "how about it? Ready to go on?"

"Oh sure, sure," he answered. "What's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"Oh no," I said jauntily. "Everything is perfect, only to get our continuity straight, you'll have to wade out with Florence; way out up to your chin; then you can both splash around like hell, and you carry her in from there, see?"

"I see," said Victor, shivering. He tried out his legs to learn whether they would still work. "You know, Bill," he added wistfully, "the more I see of pictures the better I like the theater."

* * * * * * *

In sharp contrast to the chill of an open air swimming pool in March, I remember the desert's heat in August. By some strange decree of fate, which we never could understand nor, apparently, avoid, it always seemed to be the case that water-stuff had to be done in the colder months, while desert-stuff invariably occurred in the hottest part of summer.

In this particular August I was shooting "The Heir to the Hoorah," and Tom Meighan was my leading man. Our headquarters were at Palm Springs, under the shadow of

Mount Jacinto in the Mojave Desert. This was in the days when Palm Springs had not yet been adopted by the movie colony as a resort. The town was only a cluster of weather-beaten dwellings, served by a typical, Western country store; a desert settlement in an Indian reservation. If you walked a few hundred yards from the little oasis of the village, you were in the trackless waste of the desert itself, with all its mysterious sense of loneliness, its mirages, its deceiving distances and its cruel grandeur.

At the foot of Palm Canyon, where we were working, the temperature was 130° and the camera crew had to keep wet cloths over the film cases to cool them by evaporation. There was no ice within fifty miles. If you wanted a drink of water you took it warm and noticed that it was strongly "on the alkaline side."

Tom, playing our hero, was supposed to be lost in the desert. His canteen empty, he is dying of thirst as he reaches the water-hole only to find it dried up. He has his moment of despair and then, half-crazed and delirious, he sees a beautiful mirage across the shimmering sand and forces himself to struggle on until he disappears from view over an outcropping ledge. It was really quite an effective scene, with miles of desolation as a background and no sign of human habitation visible.

The heat was so killing that I had not let Tom play up in rehearsal; just walked him through it to get camera composition and position and also to be sure that the route he traversed was fairly clear of rattlesnakes, scorpions, centipedes and other items which might have taken an actor out of the proper mood. The boys had made a lovely dried water-hole surrounded by various skulls and bones brought all the way from Hollywood.

"All right, Tom," I said to him finally, "we're all ready

to go; do your stuff and don't stop acting until you go over that rocky ledge. I want to see your figure get smaller and smaller until it represents the insignificance of man opposed to the desert's silent power."

"Okay," said Tom. "Let's go."

I started the camera and Tom threw himself into his part. This was one time when he didn't have to pretend to feel the heat and we didn't have to fake the sweat on his face. His acting was so sincere that when he staggered away from the water-hole and started after the imaginary mirage he left the route we had planned and followed his artistic imagination.

"Look out, Charlie," I said to the cameraman, "he's off the trail; can you keep him in?"

"Sure," said Charlie. "He can't get away. He looks loco all right—fine stuff."

Tom reached the ledge, though not at the chosen spot. Being a good actor he knew that the farther he got away from the camera the broader his gestures had to be. He knew, also, that the ledge was his exit, and paused on the edge to do a superb piece of acting à la Monte Cristo. Then he disappeared from sight and as I gave the order to "cut," a wild yell came over the air from Tom's general direction. An expert might have analyzed that cry as being composed of pain, rage, surprise, disgust and appeal.

"Come on, boys," I called, and we dropped everything and rushed to see what had happened. As we reached the ledge and looked over, we saw. Tom, carried away by his art, had not looked before he leaped. He had landed, in a sitting posture, upon a bed of spiny cactus. He was keeping motionless but not quiet.

I could appreciate his lack of desire to move: I knew that kind of cactus. Its two-inch needles would go through shoe-

leather, and I had even used them in my phonograph to produce a softer tone than could be got from steel.

They did not, however, produce a softer tone from Tom. His language was listened to with respect and just a little awe by myself and the boys; we realized that up to now we had led sheltered lives; that all the profanity we knew was so pitifully inadequate as to be useless.

"Are you hurt, Tom?" I asked thoughtlessly.

I cannot even translate his reply, but from it I gathered that he was most uncomfortable; that he was feeling all the tortures of the damned, but that that was child's play to what he felt if he stirred. He suggested that I cease standing there like some Biblical example of an ass and do something about it; also that time was an element which was becoming increasingly valuable to him, if not to me. He even criticized my direction but, under the circumstances, I forbore to remind him that he and not I had chosen this particular spot for his exit.

I could think of only one way to rescue him: he had to be lifted bodily from his seat of pain and carried to a less penetrating resting place. We set about it and four of us grasped him, at the price of getting a few spines in our own legs.

"Gently, boys, go easy," I warned, and added to the sufferer, "This is going to hurt a little, Tom; those needles will come out of the plant easier than they will out of you."

Using short, primitive words Tom urged immediate action and postponement of discussion and analysis.

"Okay, boys, all together," I said, and we lifted.

"Owooo—oo!" said Tom.

As I had predicted, the needles tore out at their roots, which left Tom portable and voluble but not at all philosophical. With much care we bore him from the cactus

and laid him, for obvious reasons, face down on the desert floor. We removed his nether garments, an act which, in itself, turned out to be something of a major operation, and started the long process of extracting the spines, one by one, using mechanic's pliers as forceps. We made an interesting group, although not ideal for screen purposes, and I wondered how many times this same desert had seen similar bands of pioneers aiding a wounded comrade. But the picture was not quite perfect in heroic atmosphere, for Tom, brave though he was, saw no reason to be stoical and the removal of each barbed arrow was marked by a sharp yelp.

Later, after the film was finished, I never saw that particular sequence without feeling an irrepressible desire to giggle. How fortunate for us, whose business it is to create illusion, that the audience cannot see what happens in the course of production. Incidents behind the scenes are usually interesting, but the picture left in the mind is not always romantic, which, I suppose, is one reason why every company employs a highly paid and brilliantly imaginative publicity department to aid the public in weaving magic webs of fancy about its stars. They must not be thought of as common clay, these charming shadows who take us out of our workaday world into a more exciting life. It is the will of the people that these be gods and not mortals—or, as one of them naïvely confided to me, "It is the voice of the *vox populi.*"

It may have been because Tom Meighan was by nature a gentle and kindly soul that fate marked him for another hair-raising experience. The occasion was my brother's production of Sir James M. Barrie's play, "The Admirable Crichton," which startled the literati of two continents by appearing on the screen as "Male and Female." This change of title, though somewhat drastic from an academic point

of view, was considered wise showmanship for several practical reasons. Only a small portion of the picture audience would have understood that Barrie's phrase refers to a man who is good at doing a number of things. Many of the public, it was feared, would read the name as "The Admiral Crichton" and, most important of all, the original title promised neither sex interest nor high adventure. "Male and Female," on the other hand, had a certain salty tang well within the understanding of all.

Faced with a similar problem, many years ago, my father and David Belasco had called their play "Men and Women," which was daring enough in the early nineties, when no lady liked to be called a woman, and to call her a female was the ultimate insult. As a contrast to this gentle boldness of the mauve decade, "Male and Female" was typically early post-war. Its choice as a label for Barrie's polite comedy was considered nothing short of inspirational. It took off the lid and shot the works. It was what is technically known as a wow.

Tom had been chosen to play Crichton and the lovely Gloria Swanson was Lady Mary. There was also a live leopard which had been thoughtfully written in by the Director-General to give point to Sir James's description of the desert island as a wild and dangerous place. This effect was achieved completely from the moment the leopard became a member of the cast. She was a beautiful specimen in appearance, her name was Minnie, and she had been hired for the part from a circus which was laid up for the winter.

But it was evident from the first that Minnie's heart was not in her work; in fact, Minnie hated pictures with the animosity of a Pennsylvania censor, and resented taking direction even from the Director-General himself. Although treated with the utmost kindness and respect, Min-

nie's feelings toward her fellow actors were obviously one hundred per cent carnivorous, and while, according to tradition, she could not change her spots, she frequently caused other members of the company to change theirs.

The scene called for Gloria, hunting alone on the island, to see the leopard and be frightened, as she is armed only with a small, ladylike bow and arrow. The crafty cat, sensing the situation, begins to stalk the terrified girl and is crawling up on her prepared to spring; but just as the fatal leap begins, Tom, who has been observing the whole affair and carries a bigger and better bow and arrow, looses his shaft and the beast rolls over and over in its death agonies. Tom then mercifully finishes the job with a homemade hunting knife and shoulders the corpse to carry back to camp. Thus the way is prepared for a romantic, pictorial love scene, with the long, spotted body hanging around Tom's neck in the manner of a fur scarf.

Interesting as this conception was, there were certain technical difficulties in carrying it out. Simple methods could not be used because C. B. had agreed to return Minnie alive and well, a stipulation which caused major directorial problems. As long as the animal was not in actual contact with the players, cutbacks could be used and Minnie could play her part of the scene alone, in a set surrounded by wire through which the camera could shoot; but when it came to hand-to-hand fighting and actually picking up the carcass to drape around Tom's neck the matter called for careful consideration.

It was planned at first to use a stuffed leopard for the latter half of the scene, but all the Director-General's skill, backed by the ingenuity of a brilliant property department, could not make the substitute look like anything except just what it was—a stuffed leopard.

After losing a whole day in trying to make this bit of taxidermy respond to the spirit of the scene, C. B. decided upon heroic measures. "There's no use monkeying with this damn thing," he said wearily. "No matter how you handle it, its legs stick out like posts, its tail's got arthritis, its eyes look like cheap jewelry and its whole body is about as pliable as a stone wall. I've got to have a dead leopard that's limp and floppy."

"I don't know what else we can do, Mr. deMille," said the property man. "We've tried everything."

C. B. regarded him with a baleful glare. "Oh, no we haven't," he said; "we haven't tried the real leopard."

Tom, who had been casually interested in the conversation, now became definitely concerned. "But look, C. B.," he put in, "we promised not to kill Minnie."

"We're not going to kill Minnie," said C. B.

Tom looked dubious. "If she's not dead," he remarked gently, "I don't want her around *my* neck."

C. B. sighed. He looked at his stalwart, young leading man as a father might at his wayward son, more in sorrow than anger. "Tom, you've worked in a lot of pictures with me. Have you ever been killed, or eaten, or even badly mangled?"

"Well—no," admitted Tom, "not *badly*."

"Then don't start worrying now. We'll chloroform Minnie and when she's unconscious she'll be as limp as a rag and we'll get the scene before she comes to." The director's eye kindled as he thought of the possibilities: "My boy, it'll be great! A love scene with a real, live leopard around your neck—it's never been done."

"Maybe there's a reason," muttered Tom darkly.

Next morning everything had been arranged. A large box had been constructed with a portcullis door on the side

and a small trapdoor on top. Cast and cameras were waiting as Minnie, enticed by food, entered the box, heard the portcullis fall and found herself a prisoner in the dark. Beyond a snarl or two, she accepted the situation with good grace, appeased by the meat she sought. Then, through the little trapdoor on top, several large sponges soaked in chloroform were dropped into the box and the trap closed.

It became clear at once that Minnie did not like chloroform, that she violently resented the whole proceeding, and that she would do her utmost to escape from her nearly airtight compartment. The box shook as she flung herself against its sides, and we could hear her claws cutting gashes in the wood as she snarled, growled, spat and yelled.

C. B. grinned at Tom: "My boy, I'll bet that's the noisiest piece of fur you ever wore."

Tom's answering smile had all the merriment of a French aristocrat approaching the guillotine, but he said nothing; he was not in the mood for repartee.

Meanwhile, Minnie's protests were diminishing in volume; the yells ceased, the snarls became whines, then a soft thud and silence.

The property man looked gingerly through the trapdoor. "She's down and out, sir," he reported; "give her a couple more minutes and we can go."

"Okay. Lights," said C. B. The actors took their places, the Kleiglights flashed on and the supine form of the leopard was pulled from its box while a strong odor of chloroform filled the set. Minnie was gently carried by the legs and draped around Tom's neck as per instructions.

"Fine, fine," exulted the director. "Now *that's* more like it; she's limp as a piece of seaweed, and she's *real.*"

"Sure she's real," murmured Tom weakly, "she's drooling."

"Great," chanted C. B.; "just the touch we need, but don't notice it. I want you to be entirely unconscious of the animal; play the scene just as if she wasn't there."

Tom looked as if he wanted to say something, but didn't; he had a slightly greenish look, due, no doubt, to the mingled odors of leopard and chloroform right under his nose. And he was to play as if they weren't there. This was a hell of a love scene.

"Camera," said the director; and, like the good trouper he was, Tom instantly became Crichton, while the dainty Gloria, who had been holding herself somewhat aloof from these preliminaries, jumped into her part and placed her hand on Minnie's flank as the action started.

It was a lengthy scene, but the actors, well rehearsed, lost themselves in it until near the end, when certain deep abdominal rumblings from Minnie, felt rather than heard, warned all concerned that art was long and time was fleeting.

"For I was a King in Babylon," read Tom with great fervor and nobility, but added without moving his lips: "Oh my God! she's coming to; she's coming to!"

"Go on, damn it, go on!" yelled C. B.

"Ur-r-r-gh," sighed Minnie.

"And you were a Christian slave," said Tom bravely; then, aside: "She's growling; what'll I do?"

"Go on!" screamed the director. "Never mind that little cat, *go on!*"

Gloria, undaunted, keeping her hand on the reviving beast gazed up into Tom's eyes. "I love you," she breathed, "I love you."

"Ahr-re," complained Minnie; she was still asleep but her claws now unsheathed themselves to their full length.

Conrad Nagel, (L), Bebe Daniels and Wallace Reid in "Nice People," 1922.

Adolphe Menjou and Bebe Daniels in "The World's Applause," 1922.

William deMille, Clara Beranger and Julian Street while turning Street's Book, "Rita Coventry," into the picture, "Don't Call It Love," 1923.

Tom looked tenderly at Gloria's scantily clothed beauty. His face expressed infinite yearning and devotion as he said, out of the side of his mouth: "Her claws; they'll spoil the picture."

"They're perfect," snapped C. B. "Dying agony; *go on.*"

There were only a few more lines, and somehow they were played and a triumphant exit achieved. As the welcome word, "Cut," was spoken Minnie gave a convulsive flop, and Tom, with sweat running down his brow, established a new studio record for relinquishing leopards.

C. B. came up beaming. "Nice work, Tommy," he chuckled. "Now that you're getting bored with carrying leopards around, we'll try tigers in the next picture."

Tom's color was slowly returning under his make-up. "Whatever you say, C. B.," he grinned, "only please don't get thinking about elephants."

Millions of people saw that scene on the screen, and not one suspected what good trouping lay behind it. Yet Tom played a scene for me in "The Prince Chap" which called for even more self-control; a simple scene, in which he opens a cellar door and several rats run out. I didn't know until we were ready to take the shot that Tom, for all his nerve, had a special phobia; the sight of a rat or even a mouse turned him physically ill. He was never able to account for it; it may have been pre-natal influence but it was undoubtedly a fact. I had some nice, wild rats in a trap, fierce-looking fellows, freshly caught; but when Tom had finally nerved himself up to the scene and the trap was opened, those rats disappeared so quickly that not even the camera saw them go, and nobody, to this day, knows where they went. Tom nearly collapsed from sheer physical revulsion; and later, when we finally got some tame white rats

and dyed them brown, his distress was quite as great. It cost him more to play that little scene than it did to play the long one with a reviving and revengeful leopard on his neck.

* * * * * * *

Other incidents of those crowded years reveal themselves as I draw back the curtain which hides the past. One long afternoon I distinctly remember because it set the feet of a promising young actress firmly upon the road which led to great success.

We were making a war-spy picture called "The Secret Game," in which the leading parts were played by that splendid Japanese actor, Sessue Hayakawa, and a comparatively unknown American girl, Florence Vidor.

Florence, Texas-born, obviously of good family, beautiful, cultured and sensitive, had great dramatic intelligence but suffered from the usual Anglo-Saxon inhibition against "letting go" emotionally. She had the typically American feeling that to unclothe the emotions was as indecent as stripping the body. She was ready, able and willing but could never quite overcome the natural reserve which had become part of her nature. In those days of the silent film, motion-picture acting had to be completely physical. Robbed of the great help which voice lends to dramatic expression, actors had to convey thought, feeling and emotion entirely through their faces and bodies which, therefore, had to be fluid, unrestrained and absolutely responsive to the impulse of the moment. Latins, Jews and all the easily excited races find less difficulty in achieving this than do Anglo-Saxons, trained from infancy to emotional repression and "poker-faced" immobility.

On this particular afternoon, the scene to be played was one that called for great abandonment on the part of the

actress. She had to express fear, horror and grief in a crescendo which climaxed in utter emotional collapse. It was a long scene as we reckoned time then, nearly two minutes in all, and after rehearsing it carefully for an hour I turned the camera on it at four o'clock. It didn't go very well: in spite of her willingness to do all she could, Florence just couldn't break through her shell of well-bred reticence. She felt the scene in her mind, but she couldn't make her face and her body run the emotional gamut which, alone, could make the audience feel all that the girl was going through.

After several attempts, which were no better, I drew Hayakawa aside. "Sessue," I said, "this is going to be tough on you. I know that girl has it in her, and I'm going to get it out if it kills all three of us. Will you play ball?"

He smiled his slow Japanese smile. "Sure," he said, "sure. You go get it; I play ball."

Then began the long process of breaking the girl down; repeating the scene time after time, sometimes with the camera turning, sometimes without; being gentle with her and harsh in turn, pleading, sarcastic, brutal, until the poor child had lost all sense of time and place. She only knew she was tired, unhappy, miserable; she didn't care if she ever played a part or not; she hated me until she was weeping from sheer rage and hysteria.

This went on until after eight o'clock, without pause or rest. The girl was getting closer and closer to a real performance, but hadn't quite made it. The camera and light crews, sensing what was happening, were quiet and tense, performing their duties like automatons. Sessue, well-trained actor that he was, stood up to the ordeal like a Spartan, but was careful not to burn himself out until I called for it.

At half-past eight, poor little Florence hardly knew whether she was alive or dead; her hair was disheveled, her face streaked with tears, her voice hoarse (but that didn't count then), and a look of wild desperation was in her eyes. She was ready.

I walked over to her, scowling. "Now, Florence," I growled, "I'm going to turn on this just once more. This is the last time; I'm sick of it and I'm sick of you. You say you've given me everything you've got; that's silly—all you've given me so far is what any high-school amateur could do. Now I'm going to turn those cameras, and if you've got any guts at all, by God you'll play that scene and quit lying down on the job."

Her eyes flashed at the insult and she opened her mouth to reply.

"Never mind," I said savagely. "Save it. Fix your make-up. I don't give a damn how badly you feel—get ready."

She gave me a look of undying hatred, checked a sob and turned away, her whole body quivering. I winked at Sessue: "This is it, boy; give it to me this time."

The lights came on and we were set. "Camera," and the scene began.

The girl threw herself into action with an abandonment born of insult, rage and despair. Gone were all her inhibitions, all her cultured little gestures. Too outraged and weary to think, she could only feel and she swept through the scene like a tornado, giving Sessue all the dramatic resistance which up to now had been lacking.

"Cut," I said, and she stood in the middle of the stage, sobbing, shaking, ready to collapse. This time she *had* given all she had—and it was enough. Sessue grinned at me as I put my arms around the hysterical child. "My dear," I said, "no one could have done it better."

She broke down and wept on my shoulder. "I wish I were dead," she wailed.

"Oh no, you don't," I smiled, "but I always want you to remember this day—for I honestly believe that today you really became an actress."

And her subsequent career made me think I was right.

* * * * * * *

A later experience which I shall never forget was the day on which it became my duty to direct another sensitive young girl, Lois Wilson, in her first passionate love scene. Lois had great natural talent, within the range of her knowledge, but she had been raised in the bosom of the family, where men were brothers, and she had a virginal quality as hard to shake as Gibraltar.

The picture was called "Midsummer Madness," and Lois played the part of a young wife who is swept by a sudden wave of the cosmic urge into the arms of her husband's best friend, in the person of Conrad Nagel, then just beginning his screen career. There is a hectic scene in the husband's hunting lodge to which Conrad, with a keen sense of the fitness of things, has driven her for a little genteel seduction. Ultimately the young wife finds herself being carried away in a current of passionate desire, the like of which she has evidently not met in her brief, matrimonial career and which is bearing her fast to what all good people know as disaster. She yields to his embraces; their youth flames with a ruddy glow; there is a kiss which might lead to anything except keeping the Seventh Commandment, and the lady is about to capitulate *in toto* when, believe it or not, she comes face to face with a framed photograph of her husband and innocent child. Reaction

sets in; then revulsion. She sees what a vile thing she was about to do, and thus the heroine is saved from her impulse and the picture from the censors.

This was, indeed, a pretty kettle of fish to set before a girl who had once been a schoolteacher and who still thought of kissing as exclusively a family custom, and, I strongly suspect, still believed the doctor brought babies in his little black bag. How on earth could I make this young actress portray what a woman feels who is blinded by passion; swept by desire? I had no hope of making her really understand the scene, for I had been told by experts that these things must have been felt in order to be understood, but it was my job to make her look and act as if she knew what she was doing.

We rehearsed the scene for mechanics, movement and composition. Lois's demeanor during the seduction scene suggested that of a little girl going up to be confirmed, and her great kiss of passion reminded me of an innocent, carefree lassie bidding Grandpa good-by for the holidays. When I explained, patiently, that that was not quite the idea and she tried to give me her conception of quick, hot love, she acted as if she had been suddenly surprised in her bath. Something radical had to be done, and it had to be done gently: you couldn't be rough with Lois, who would burst into floods of tears at an unkind glance.

I was fortunate in having Conrad in the other part. He was like a big brother to Lois, who knew him well and liked him. He was a fine, well-trained actor who could help her forget her self-consciousness.

We set the lights and the cameras and I sent everyone off the set, except the two actors. The crew was to appear, silently, at my signal and be ready to take the scene without a word being spoken.

Then, for two hours, I talked quietly to Lois, with Conrad sitting beside her. I gave her a brief outline of the sweet mystery of life. I started with the flowers, the birds and the bees and ended with thumbnail sketches of the Decameron. I told her much more than I shall ever know about a woman's feelings under emotional stress and strain. I painted the beauty of Eros, the desirable qualities of Venus, with digressions into the evils of false modesty and the crime of self-consciousness. I told her how much she loved this man, and how sublime it was to sacrifice oneself for love.

When I had talked her into an emotional coma, I gave the signal for lights and camera. I crouched under the lens and more or less hypnotized the girl through her scene, with Conrad nobly aiding and abetting.

It was good, surprisingly good; and I chuckled when Lois came to me, wide-eyed, a month later and told me that her mother had seen the film and had said: "My dear, I think it will be some years before you know how well you played that scene."

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And so the cavalcade of pictures plodded on through those magic years, each member of the little army giving what he had, doing what he could to carry the banner forward to the promised land of Art.

Good troupers all.

CHAPTER XII

It required a period of only eleven years for the motion picture to develop from "The Life of an American Fireman" and "The Great Train Robbery," both made in 1903, as the first examples of picture-stories more than a minute in length, to "The Spoilers," eight reels in length and the first "super-picture" made in America. "The Spoilers" was produced in April, 1914, and opened the new Strand Theater in New York, which was the first large theater to be built in the United States exclusively for pictures. A further period of fourteen years, 1914 to 1928, saw the silent picture reach its height and die a reluctant but almost instantaneous death with the coming of sound.

It seems almost impossible that in one short generation so great a development could have occurred in a major branch of dramatic art, or that the new art and the vast industry which grew up around it could have passed in so short a time through so many changes of idea and of organization. Surely no other art has ever had so quick a growth from infancy to maturity; but no other art was ever so pressed by public demand or was designed to fill so universal a need.

Once the battle for longer films had been waged and won, and the feature picture adopted as standard form by popular acclaim, probably the first major change which vitally affected methods of picture production and exhibition was the growing importance of stars and their relation to the selling value of the product. This change was brought

about entirely by the public itself, the producers being forced to yield to popular pressure, even though they saw from the first that it threatened to take the control of motion pictures out of their own safe, sane and conservative hands and place it in the more temperamental and sometimes erratic hands of their most popular actors.

It was an era in which the names of writers and directors meant nothing to the public; even company trade-marks meant very little, as the quality of most pictures was, at best, uncertain. The only thing the customers could count on in advance to give them some degree of satisfaction for their money was the name of a favorite player whose work and personality they knew and liked. The people wanted stars, in fact they insisted upon having them; and under terrific, throat-cutting competition, stars soon became so valuable that there was grave danger of their taking all the profits so that no one else in pictures could make a living.

Dear little Mary Pickford, for instance, who only five or six years before had been so delighted to get her five dollars a day from Mr. Griffith, was now Paramount's most valuable star. Although always a sincere artist in her work, Mary was also a student of the Bible and believed that the laborer was worthy of his hire. This she gently explained to Mr. Zukor, telling him that she hadn't the slightest intention of being unreasonable but that she just couldn't see her way clear to work for less than seven thousand large, round, gold-standard dollars per week *plus* half the profits of her pictures. Mr. Zukor couldn't possible afford to let Mary go at that time; her pictures were a powerful aid in selling the whole Paramount program, so a deal was made and Mary began to drop quite a few nickels into her little savings bank.

But by 1918 things had come to a point where the pa-

tient Mr. Zukor was beginning to wonder if, after all, he could afford to keep Mary working for him, or if he wouldn't save a lot of money by simply giving her the studio and taking a small salary for himself.

First National, a new and striving competitor, had just offered America's sweetheart $225,000 each, for three pictures a year. They needed her name on their program and figured it was worth that sum to get her away from Paramount and into their own camp. Other stars, such as Douglas Fairbanks and Charlie Chaplin, had also found rich, gold-bearing veins in the nation's heart, and even lesser lights were beginning to command salaries which sounded like the Arabian Nights. Times were beginning to look up for the more popular actors, but the poor producers were by way of being out on a limb; in fact, they were exactly between those two playful teammates, the Devil and the Deep Sea. If they made long-term contracts of fabulous prices with heroes of the hour and, as frequently happened, the hero stopped being a hero before the contract stopped being a contract, the resulting catastrophe might easily wreck the company. If, on the other hand, they made short-term contracts, at the end of which their stars were more popular than ever, the unlucky producers were faced with competitive bidding by other companies which was nothing short of sanguinary.

Seeing no way of successfully grasping this bull by the horns, the adroit Mr. Zukor tried to lead it gently by the nose. With compassionate eye and throbbing voice he told Mary that she was tired, that she had been working much too hard for many years and needed a long rest. No line must ever be allowed to mar her beautiful face, nor should that face ever appear on any screen save Paramount's. Just think what Mary and Paramount had meant to each other

these last few years! The thought of her going to another company, where perhaps she would not be so well loved, hurt the kindly Mr. Zukor in his deepest and most sensitive feelings. So, just for friendship and auld lang syne, he would give her one thousand dollars every week for five years on condition that she would take a complete rest during that period and not bother her pretty little head about pictures at all.

Mary's large, soulful and expensive eyes opened wide as she regarded her generous benefactor with feeling. She was much touched and deeply moved. If the thought occurred to her that, from Paramount's point of view, it was well worth $260,000 to eliminate her for five years as a competitor she brushed it aside as unworthy. She, too, knew what friendship meant, and her affection for dear, considerate Mr. Zukor was fully as deep as his for her. But, after all, she was only a young girl just on the threshold of what might prove to be a successful career. She was a little tired, perhaps, but not quite tired enough to take a five years' vacation, at the end of which she would undoubtedly be five years older. So, while she knew that Mr. Zukor, old and trusted friend as he was, had only her own best interest in mind, she felt that she owed something to her art as well as to her public which, in a few short years, had set such a price on her services that Mr. Zukor, anticipating the economic principles of a later generation, was willing to pay her a thousand dollars a week for not making pictures; fifty-two thousand a year to let herself be plowed under.

Timidly, in her innocent, childlike way, she explained all this to the man who was so anxious to protect her from the hard life of professional exertion. Tempting as his offer was, she would rather work for $675,000 *per annum* than rest for $52,000. She had certain obligations, and that

difference of $623,000 every year would go a long way toward helping her to meet them. It desolated her to think of leaving Paramount where she had been so happy and contented, but, after all, duty was a much nobler goal than mere happiness; so unless Mr. Zukor could see his way clear to meet these terms— The poor child could say no more; she was a young artist, and they kept forcing her to talk about money. It was too bad.

Mr. Zukor laid this problem reverently upon the council table, around which sat his associates, C. B. and Jesse Lasky. What to do? Mary in the hands of the enemy would prove a powerful threat to Paramount's supremacy. Mary in their own hands would suck all the juice out of the company orange, leaving them the bitter skin and a few pips. Nor was the problem confined to Mary alone, for, once the precedent was established, all the other important stars would demand similar treatment and the producers would then have reached the goal for which so many of them claimed to be striving: working for the sake of art alone.

C. B. thought he knew the answer: new stars. The Director-General had been watching the trend of the times and had long been convinced that good writing and good direction could make successful pictures even without big stars. He advocated starting a group of director-writer pictures, in the course of which new personalities would be acquired and developed into stellar magnitude.

But would the public accept new stars?

C. B. thought that, under the right conditions, they would. He finally persuaded Zukor and Lasky that he could find promising young actors, still comparatively unknown, and by putting them in just the right parts in just the right stories, with careful direction, build them up into stars, thus insuring steady profits for the Company. He felt so

sure he was right that the others finally decided to let Mary go and told C. B. to start on his new program of "all-star" pictures, which, in the ingenuous but deceptive terminology of the day, meant pictures without any stars. Meanwhile Paramount would keep all its other stars and let time decide which was the better system.

Thus encouraged, C. B. started on his long career of "director" pictures. D. W. Griffith had been doing the same thing for some time, making his stars as he went along, and had already given the world such spectacles as "The Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance." Other directors followed their lead, and so well did they work that, by the end of 1919, although stars were still valuable, the stronger directors and writers were demonstrating that stellar names were not indispensable. The star system began to crack a bit and the day of bigger salaries to directors and writers began.

One thing I have always admired about my younger brother is his ability to bite off more than he can chew, and then chew it. He did so now. From Professor Mack Sennett's interesting school of bathing beauties he chose such glowing maidens as Gloria Swanson, Bebe Daniels and Phyllis Haver and made them important, dramatic actresses. He told me that the sense of timing, so essential in slapstick comedy, is invaluable preparation for more serious work.

He then looked about him and discovered that, ever since the end of the war, our hitherto sedate and virtuous country had become much interested in the facts of life. Young people were talking of nothing except what they called "the new freedom." There was general youthful rebellion at the sort of world their elders had handed down to them, so they promptly proceeded to make it worse. Skirts had been creep-

ing up and necklines down until they threatened to meet; petting parties were pseudo-connubial in character, and conversation among the immature would have brought a deep blush to the cheek of Good Queen Bess. The noble experiment had resulted in more intoxicated youngsters than this sweet land of Liberty has ever seen, before or since.

Having analyzed the situation carefully, C. B. decided that this was not an opportune time to picturize the Elsie Books. The whole nation had just found out that sex had something to do with life, a thought which intrigued the popular mind with all the attraction of a new idea. The theater screamed it out with a frankness of language previously unknown to the American stage. Current literature divested itself of all inhibitions, called spades spades and made them trumps. Everyone was interested in this newly discovered subject, the majority being in favor of further investigation, while a very voluble minority strove earnestly to bury the matter where the keen noses of the young could not smell it out. Among this group of national chaperones it had long been the rule that, upon the screen at least, the laws of human nature must not conflict with any city ordinance, and that the only visions which could be evoked in a young male by the sight of feminine beauty were those of a robed priest and a nuptial altar.

Up to this time the most notable exponent of what soon came to be known as sex appeal was the vivid Theda Bara, whose portrayal of the "Vampire," in a picture based on Kipling's poem, enriched our language with the word "vamp" both as noun and verb. There were also a few others who presented the theme in an equally elemental and cosmically urgent manner.

C. B., being not entirely inexperienced and having done much reading, had come to the conclusion that the whole

subject of sex, from a dramatic standpoint, was much more complicated and interesting, even more entertaining and attractive, than the screen had so far shown it to be. He thereupon started a new era of stories: smart, sophisticated comedy-dramas which, to a large extent, avoided life in the raw and served it *en brochette* with spicy sauces. His main idea was to broaden the field of modern romance and if Boy had to meet Girl, to add a distinctly modern touch by having one or both of them married. This, of course, shattered with one mighty swat the age-old screen tradition that romantic love was exclusively the property of the unwed, and that for husband or wife to feel any attraction except toward each other was a sin which, ultimately, had to be expiated with blood and tears. In his hands, and in those of his able scenario-writer, Jeanie McPherson, the soulless vamp of the past became an understandable and invariably beautiful young woman who usually loved honestly though perhaps a trifle illegally: a heroine in reverse. In pictures of early days, good was good and bad was bad and never the twain could meet except in mortal conflict. With the dawn of sophistication, on the screen good and bad became almost as inextricably mixed as they are in life. We began to see villains with charm; or were they not villains, but just people? C. B. delighted in dealing with various forms of feminine lure with which the ladies of the audience fondly identified themselves. His characters took on a modern plausibility, which had been lacking in the more elemental figures of olden times. Above all, he handled the whole subject of sex with a delicacy which did not rob it of its meaning, and set it against a background of visual beauty and luxury.

This new formula was hailed with loud hosannas by the public of that day, when everyone was interested in

money, finery and gaiety. It was a new world, which a large part of the audience had come to accept as the United States of the future; a world of silken underwear, exotic surroundings and moral plasticity; a world where money flowed like water, which, in turn, had been supplanted as a beverage by wine; a world in which the chief purpose of life was excitement and the only threat to happiness was boredom; in which the only public enemy was the double standard and romance was an eternal search for "It." This was what the people, as a whole, wanted to see; a sumptuous and spectacular dramatization of the age of jazz, prohibition and flaming youth.

There were, of course, groups who complained that these highly colored portraits of the times were not only exaggerated but that they entirely neglected to show those basic virtues upon which our country had grown to power. This was not quite just, for in every one of C. B.'s pictures of this period, the homely beliefs of our forefathers could be seen, a bit submerged perhaps, but slowly crawling toward the surface and usually emerging, victorious, at the finish. It may be that the young director-producer felt it only fair to explore Nineveh and Babylon with great care before he could reveal himself, with authority, as a major prophet preaching against the evils of those fascinating but improper cities. Sodom and Gomorrah he naturally let severely alone: there was no argument about them, they were not only unattractive but distinctly un-American.

It was during this phase of his development and during the production of "Male and Female" that he started his series of "fade-backs" to ancient times, with Tom Meighan as the mounted and fur-clad barbarian, capturing degenerate Rome and carrying off the fair Gloria as his prize.

The public liked this so well that for a time C. B. made

(L to R) Agnes Ayres, Edward Knoblock, Clara Beranger and William deMille, while filming "The Marriage Maker," 1923.

Charles deRoche as the faun in "The Marriage Maker," 1923.

it a part of his formula, in many pictures fading back to a period in which he could indulge his taste and that of his audience for spectacle, and still tie it into his story by analogy. His use of this method reached its height some years later when, in "The Ten Commandments," he preceded his modern, seven-reel story by a gorgeous, five-reel picturization of the Exodus from Egypt. In this picture the passage of the Red Sea was the forerunner of those visual miracles which have since been achieved by studio technicians. It was, by the way, during the shooting of this picture that Theodore Roberts and James Neil, in Biblical costume and make-up, who had been waiting patiently for an hour outside the Director-General's office, finally sent in the message: "Just say that Moses and Aaron are waiting to see God."

In less than two years after C. B. had started his new school of sex à la mode, the public had elected him one of the three greatest box-office attractions in the country; the other two being Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin. Only one other director had ever attained, in his own right, the drawing power of a real star, and that was D. W. Griffith. And among all the many splendid directors who have reached the heights since those days, I know of none who has ever acquired for himself the great national and international following of these two pioneers.

If C. B. carried any particular torch during this period it probably was that the little things of life—ordinary acts of living—could be made amusing, attractive—even aesthetic, instead of being ugly, sordid or commonplace. He made of the bathroom a delightful resort which undoubtedly had its effect upon bathrooms of the whole nation. The bath itself became a mystic shrine dedicated to Venus, or sometimes to Apollo, and the art of bathing was

shown as a lovely ceremony rather than a merely sanitary duty. Undressing was not just the taking off of clothes; it was a progressive revelation of entrancing beauty; a study in diminishing draperies. The theme was that in no stage of dress or undress, whether in the bathroom, the kitchen, the ballroom or the bedroom, need a woman look unlovely. To this end underclothes became visions of translucent promise, and nightgowns silken poems set to music.

I suspect that the public's genuine delight in these pictures of life as it might be lived was not so much decadent as it was a real response to the suggestion that everyone's daily existence could be made happier by the use of a little good taste and an appreciation of lovely things. Millions of respectable citizens took to the idea that if two people have decided to live together they might as well do it beautifully. Many of them saw wisdom in the thought that love should not be subjected to the wear and tear of annoying, familiar habits, nor jeopardized by unromantic views of necessary but intimate personal doings. Some even realized that an untimely wielding of the domestic toothbrush has wrecked more homes than has the husband's best friend.

In the matter of clothes alone C. B.'s pictures of the early nineteen-twenties probably affected American dress more than did any other one influence. Before this, Paris fashion shows had been accessible only to the chosen few. C. B. revealed them to the whole country, the costumes his heroines wore being copied by hordes of women and girls throughout the land, especially by those whose contacts with centers of fashion were limited or non-existent. He achieved this, of course, not by accident but by engaging the best artists of dress he could find; his gowns, lingerie, shoes, hats and hair-dressing were all done by the best Parisian and New York style experts. This was, and still is, no simple prob-

lem, as the clothing and coiffures must be designed and in use in the studio at least six months before they become publicly fashionable.

It took only a few years of this sort of thing to make C. B. weary of the shallowness of sophisticated comedy. He had enjoyed playing with it for a while and it had made him the biggest box-office director of that day, but before long he reacted against the very decadence of the jazz-mad age which he had expressed so successfully. He began to feel that the decadent decade was on the wane and homely virtues of the past began to appeal to him with reminiscent charm. Having attended to the underclothes, bathrooms and matrimonial irregularities of his fellow citizens, he now began to consider their salvation. He has always had too great a sense of real human values to be content, for more than short periods, to devote his work to the frivolities of life. He is a natural-born torchbearer and is never so happy as when doing battle for an ideal. Being, perhaps, not more than seventy per cent superhuman, he may occasionally choose an ideal to fight for which will not bear too close an analysis. It is possible that he did this in "The Crusades," in which he endeavored to glorify one of the world's greatest political, economic, religious and bigoted mistakes, but he was, no doubt, too much impressed by the genuine ardor and personal heroism of the crusaders to weigh either the importance of their objective or the soundness of their philosophy; in fact, the showman led the thinker into a swamp from which only a superb and spectacular production drew him out alive.

"The Ten Commandments" represented C. B.'s first major effort along the new path he had chosen to travel. This was followed a few years later by "The King of Kings," which most people consider his greatest work for

the silent screen. During the production of "The King of Kings" C. B. soon discovered that dealing with a subject of such importance brought its own particular collection of trials and tribulations. The poor boy had thought, in his simple, trusting way, that by sticking closely to the Gospels and treating the narrative with due reverence and all the art he possessed, he would be doing something worth while in giving the world a vivid picture of the life and death of one of its greatest philosophers. From the very beginning, however, it became evident that many members of the clergy, while approving the general idea, had grave doubts that the producer would tell this important story in a manner which would satisfy their own specific beliefs and opinions. Leaders of various Christian denominations gave him to understand that they held a virtual copyright on the New Testament, and that if he would avail himself of this material it would have to be strictly in accordance with their ideas. Otherwise they would feel it their Christian duty to warn their flocks that the picture was sacrilege and should be avoided by all right-thinking people. The matter was further complicated in that each one of these great leaders of religious thought differed radically from all the others in his conception of what should or should not be done.

For many reasons C. B. had no wish to antagonize the official spokesmen of any church whatever, particularly those whose word affected large sections of his potential audience. He knew it would be impossible to satisfy them all and he realized now as never before how ready were followers of The Prince of Peace to fly at one another's throats. It became his difficult task to reconcile the beliefs of a number of sects which had, up to then, been completely irreconcilable. To this end he persuaded certain

prominent clerics to be his councilors and, by consulting them one at a time instead of all together, he wove his way with great care between threatening dogmas and conflicting interpretations. Everyone seemed to be thrusting out a tentative toe hoping it would be stepped on so that he might howl to high heaven.

Before the production was fairly under way, it became clear that the rights and wrongs of all those events leading up to and including Calvary were still highly controversial. It was surprising to find out that the Christian church was still not entirely free of anti-Semitism, even though the larger part of its Bible is Jewish. It was confusing to see how lightly this wing of the church passed over the mistake God had evidently made in choosing the Jewish race to bear His Son, when there were available so many Christians in embryo and, if we may believe Caesar and Tacitus, even some Simon-pure Aryans. All these true believers saw was that the Jews had crucified the head of their organization, and that was not a matter which could be easily forgotten in a mere two thousand years. There was still a bill to be paid—and, apparently, to them. It was quite useless to argue that many of the Jews of those days hadn't yet realized that Jesus was a Christian; the theory of our own country is that ignorance of a law is no excuse for its transgression. These people of the first century had done what they had done and no mitigating circumstances should be allowed to creep into the picture: the Jews should be held strictly to account.

From the Jewish side of the controversy came equally emphatic arguments. They saw themselves aggrieved and misrepresented in the picture. Just as they thought the whole unfortunate affair had been forgotten, here came C. B. bringing it all up again. Everybody makes mistakes,

so why not let bygones *be* bygones? After building up such splendid public sympathy for the oppressed Israelites in "The Ten Commandments," why destroy the whole effect by showing them in a less favorable light a few years later? Some even feared that the picture might lead to a series of pogroms throughout the country, since everyone knew that the average Christian Soldier found it much more delightful to kill for the glory of the Master than to follow His teachings.

As a result of all these militant and conflicting opinions poor C. B., with the weight of a tremendous production on his mind as well as the responsibility of spending something like two million dollars of the Company's money, had to become a combination of St. Paul and Machiavelli. Any attempt to be fair to one side caused the other to froth at the mouth, and as he tried to be fair to both, both were pretty much against him. The zealot always believes that the highest purpose of the screen is propaganda.

The whole experience of this production was a definite illustration of the power which pictures were beginning to assert and a recognition of that power by leaders of thought. Here was a story told every Sunday in every Christian church in the world and few people paid much attention to it. But the minute the screen started to tell exactly the same story the effect was like throwing a rock into a hornet's nest. It was almost an implication that the screen was getting more powerful than the Christian church and so had to be controlled by it. This objective, so ardently desired by so many earnest churchmen, might already have been attained had the various Christian sects had more respect for one another, more unanimity in their interpretation of their Master's teaching and more ability to agree about anything in particular. But the screen always has

been, is and always will be controlled by the hearts of the world, and the hearts of the world, once they can be divorced from politics and formal religious dogma, never disagree about the humanities. This is the true source of the screen's power, and neither cleric nor dictator will ever succeed in making it the prostitute of propaganda, the thrall of theory or the prophet of prejudice.

So anxious was C. B. that this production be treated reverently that, during the period of shooting, he found it necessary to make new rules and regulations governing not only the actors but also every person connected with the picture. Deep down in the American nature there seems to be a certain impious quality which tends to jest at sacred things. It is probably nothing more than the Anglo-Saxon reaction against emotionalism mixed with the desire of a bad little boy to say something he knows he shouldn't. But it is there; and the daily sight of all the important New Testament characters walking around the studio was an opportunity for those who liked their humor with a touch of blasphemy. H. B. Warner as the Christ was of course a rare chance for the wags who wished to show what brilliant, witty, devil-may-care fellows they were, fearing neither God nor man.

Whereupon general studio orders were issued that any employee who felt his sense of humor to be stronger than his respect for a sacred symbol could draw his pay and have a really good laugh outside the studio gates. The actors themselves were warned that, as long as they wore their costumes and make-ups, they were to preserve, at all times, the dignity of their characters. Warner, whose make-up was a combination of the conceptions of several famous painters, was kept secluded in his dressing room until actually needed on the set. All the principal players had

signed a special form of contract in which they guaranteed that their conduct in private life would be exemplary during the production and for one year after its completion. It would never do to have the Virgin Mary getting a divorce or Saint John cutting up in a night club. Therefore they all signed legal documents which underwrote their behavior and their chastity, it being clearly understood that, though breaking solemn vows taken at the altar was only human, breaking a contract with the Company was really important. These precautions, however, were probably unnecessary, as I have never seen a cast more dedicated to their roles or more aware that they were instruments through which was being transmitted a message of eternal beauty.

This work marked the climax of C. B.'s career as a director of silent pictures. He did make one more, "The Godless Girl," but before he had completed it sound was upon us and the film was practically out of date by the time it was released. Except in Russia. When he visited that country a year later he found himself hailed as a leader of New Thought on account of "The Godless Girl." He had made the picture to show how necessary is a belief in God, but the crafty Russians by a few deft changes in the film had made him a brilliant Apostle of Atheism.

CHAPTER XIII

THE last ten years of the silent screen, from 1918 to 1928, might well be called the adolescent age of the motion picture, that highly formative period between infancy, when all it could do was to move, without logical thought or speech, and maturity, when it finally developed the possibility of full expression in language. Those were years in which the industry became solid and powerful, although the art, naturally taking longer to develop, went through all sorts of physical growing pains as well as many varieties of immature mental conceptions.

Although none of us in the trenches realized it, the art form of the silent picture had gone just about as far as it could without sound. Some of us may have begun to feel that the silent picture, even at its best, had always been and still was an incomplete art form; a medium which aspired to be the most popular form of drama without being able properly to use language, the very heart's blood of mature drama.

Explanatory captions, particularly when used between episodes, were, after all, no more than part of the program; they were no more part of the acted drama than was the Greek chorus which fulfilled exactly the same purpose. This is made evident by the fact that expository subtitles are frequently used today in the most modern examples of talking pictures.

But the "spoken titles," those flashed speeches which told us from time to time exactly what a character was saying—

these were indeed a bastard form of drama, deprived as they had to be of all inflection, interpretation and dramatic color. Each spectator read these speeches to himself (or unfortunately aloud), but always with the limitation of his own verbal appreciation; all those vital dramatic values supplied by inflection and tone were lost to him completely.

It is interesting to note how the growth of silent pictures toward maturity was definitely marked, every foot of the way, by a development of the spoken title. At the beginning there was none. As elements of story and character became more important, an increasing number of spoken titles was necessary so that the audience might understand what a scene was about. As subtlety and psychology gradually appeared in screen plays, spoken titles had to tell more and more; but so few speeches could be used that each one had to carry more than its fair share of the play's meaning and hence tended to become ponderous, overstuffed and unwieldy. In spite of our fond boast that we could tell *any* story on the screen if enough care were taken, we really couldn't. We could only tell a story whose nature was elemental enough to be effective without much use of language. When we tried to screen stories which needed fuller verbal expression the result was inadequate; we had to lose the very qualities which gave the work its distinction and its power.

Through its whole period of adolescence the screen developed toward maturity along the lines of smooth storytelling, of great pictorial beauty, of character, of psychology and of marvelous visual reality. But this whole growth had come to a point where, without a fuller use of language, the art could go no further. The more we attained visual reality, the more the spoken title seemed to destroy any illusion of life; the closer the art as a whole came to

painting a human dramatic picture, the more completely did the flashed speech spoil its dramatic effect. As long as the whole medium was unreal throughout, the printed word on the screen was comparatively inoffensive; but as progress toward truth was achieved in every direction but one, even the most heroic efforts to co-operate on the part of an audience couldn't quite make printed lines supply those elements of drama which alone could complete what that audience saw with its eyes. Although we didn't know it then, lack of spoken language had halted any further advance of screen drama. We had gone as far as we could in silence; explored all the elemental stories we knew as far as pantomime could take us; dared a little psychology and a lot of characterization with the few words allowed us. Picture drama was crying for more articulate expression; for a chance to grow up and take its destined place as the true drama of all the people. Just as it had happened with the slow-motion camera, the art of motion pictures was ready for sound several years before its need was first fulfilled and then recognized.

Meanwhile, through these ten extraordinary years motion pictures grew steadily in importance popularly, politically, educationally, financially, internationally and artistically. With this growth of power came, as a matter of course, enemies who feared its influence on the people, at first morally and, later, politically.

Professional reformers took their first shots at the new medium of expression on the grounds that anything which threatened to affect the thoughts of so many people was highly dangerous unless entirely controlled by men of considered opinions, like themselves. They wished to take away from film drama that very earthy quality usually existing in any young art, which has its roots deep in the people's

imagination and ideology. These valiant crusaders, with all the fanaticism and lack of logic possessed by their twelfth-century predecessors, were successful in establishing censorship and influential in carrying it to such absurd extremes that even the simplest fact of life dared not rear its ugly head in a film without being certain of decapitation, in some states at least. Inasmuch as these prophets of prudery usually accepted a good fee for performing their operations of artistic sterilization, we who made the pictures were sometimes led to wonder whether commercialized virtue might not be as unhealthy for the country as commercialized vice, while utterly lacking the latter's brighter side.

That the infant art was not completely strangled by these iron-handed nurses was due in no small part to the women's clubs of America, which soon saw that even though Junior was not quite ready to digest Tolstoi's "Resurrection," the picture need not on that account be banned from the screen. After all, adults have their rights too. By a broadminded and intelligent co-operation with producers, organized women of the whole country did much to make the screen safe for maturity. They formed a jury of such vast proportions that their opinion could not be disregarded; they were, in fact, an importantly large and articulate portion of the audience on whose approval or disapproval we lived or died. But they formed too great a cross section of honest American thought to be unduly swayed by Duces of dogma or dictators of decency. They themselves had only recently been freed from an ancient bondage called chivalry and had been granted full rights of citizenship. They realized that women could be so overprotected and shielded from facts and problems of life as to remain permanently childish, deriving all their rights from man and serving chiefly

as incubators to hatch the eggs of archaic thought. They argued that if freedom of expression and self-determination were good for women, they might also be good for pictures. Although they didn't approve of "strip-tease" acts in the theater, they had learned to laugh at a generation which said "limbs" instead of "legs," and "chest" instead of "breast," while using corsets and bustles to emphasize the very things which it was a disgrace to mention. Through the enormous membership of their clubs they helped to build organized support for all films they thought worth while, and proved themselves valuable allies to those producers who were honestly trying to work for better art rather than sanctimonious fable.

As soon as professional reformers had established censorship of the movies, professional politicians saw a double chance to benefit themselves. They saw in the struggling art a new public enemy; a new foe to attack in the interest of their constituents. If parents were unable to control the theater-going habits of their children they still need have no fear; the candidate for public office would see to it that this new Serpent in the Garden would offer no apples to innocent youth. The screen should be forced to maintain the purity of Eden at that period when people were made from other folks' ribs. Many a sober gathering, fearful lest honest thought should slip its leash and attack the very mottoes on their walls, thrilled to these assurances of governmental protection. They gave thanks for the stern guardians who would risk life and limb to prevent them from seeing any picture which, by one savage stroke, might rob them of all virtue.

Nor were these wily representatives of the people slow to see another advantage in censorship: it meant political patronage, jobs to be given to deserving supporters and,

best of all, the ideal job in which to bury reformers who always wanted to be taken care of but who were only too apt to make trouble if they got close to the driving-wheels of the party machine. Here was a God-given sop to throw to a hungry watchdog of public morality. By making him an official censor he would be a great help in keeping off the screen many things which the politicians were most anxious for the people not to see: no prostitutes, no dishonest policemen, no corrupt judges, no criticism of our public institutions, nothing, in short, which could in any way reflect discredit on the perfect leadership and pluperfect organization of our beautifully functioning democracy. Yes, by heck! Censorship was the answer to a politician's prayer: there was money in it for the State, patronage for the boss, harmless work for the powerful but pestiferous reformer; and the cream of the jest was that the movies themselves would have to foot the bills. Out of the pockets of producers would come all cash to buy the shears which ruined their pictures. Furthermore, as the movies were beginning to reflect popular thought, even to stimulate it, and as stimulation of popular thought, unless carefully directed, might prove extremely dangerous to politicians, censorship was the medium by which, under the camouflage of decency and public good, all thought on the screen could be controlled.

Let the producers strive as they will today to regulate themselves according to the Hays code; let them lean over backward to avoid indecency or bad taste; let them spend hundreds of thousands of dollars every year for their own organization of censorship, they will not reduce the number of official censorship boards throughout the nation. Too many political jobs are involved; there is too much money in morality.

An excellent example of how censorship works to keep from the screen all freedom of political thought as well as any adult discussion of the moralities occurred in April, 1937, when the Kansas Board of Review ordered cut from "The March of Time" Senator Burton K. Wheeler's remarks on reorganizing the Supreme Court. The only reason given was that the governor and legislature of the state were "for the President."

All the pro-Roosevelt remarks were left intact, only the opposing point of view being deleted, thus turning what was intended to be a non-partisan discussion into sheer propaganda and demonstrating to the political heads of Kansas that their loyal board of censors would not permit anything to appear upon the screens of that sovereign state unless it was entirely in accord with the wishes of the Great White Father.

When the remarks of a United States Senator upon a question of national importance are so arbitrarily condemned as unfit for the people to hear, surely the whole question of official censorship in this country has reached a point of *reductio ad absurdum* which should make it easier for us to understand the political bondage of the screen under dictatorships in Europe.

Following the introduction of politics into the picture world came Wall Street. The astute gentlemen who do so much to keep our country solvent suddenly realized that something was getting away from them. When the movie was in its infancy no bank would lend a dollar to a producer; picture production was understood to be an unsound industry and had to struggle along as best it could on its own feet. But with the adolescent period of pictures, larger and larger sums of money became involved, bigger and better profits were being made, and Wall Street finally saw

in the films a savory pot of gravy in which it had not a single ladle.

This would never do, so mergers and reorganizations became the order of the day. Picture companies found, almost overnight, that they had millions of dollars to play with, and thousands of innocent spectators acquired a number of very prettily engraved common-stock certificates. This began an era of studio spending, some of which was far from wise, and resulted in a large number of expensive flops. This, in turn, led to an invasion of Hollywood by master-minds of finance who took charge of certain studios, feeling that their own sound financial training would soon result in making pictures which the people wanted to see. Strangely enough, they were no more successful than the regular producers, and the thought gradually began to seep through that if the spending of huge sums did not necessarily make good pictures, neither did the most rigid economy. Lavishness alone has never made a dull story interesting, nor has efficiency ever been a satisfactory substitute for creative ability.

The headaches resulting from this application of "big business" methods to what is essentially pure "show business" have taken a long time to subside. The crossing of Wall Street and Hollywood Boulevard has left an element in the field of production which does not make for improvement in the art. As one minor producer said to me recently: "We'll build up the name of our company with a few successes and then sell out to Wall Street. We'll get enough to satisfy us, and the boys down there can play with the stock and get theirs that way." Fortunately, this is the spirit which keeps little companies little.

While the youthful art of photo-drama was still proudly feeling its muscles as they slowly developed, and hailing

Hobart Bosworth (L) and Robert Edeson in William deMille's story; "The Man Higher Up," 1928.

The author directing Kay Johnson in a fog scene inside the studio, "Passion Flower," 1930.

with glee each sprouting hair on its smooth white chin, there came from the East a caravan of important men of the theater, led by no less an authority than Augustus Thomas. They had at last become convinced that motion pictures were going to be an important feature of public entertainment and had grown impatient with our muddling efforts to adapt stage material to the screen. Their theory was that a good play was a good play, that changes in its structure or detail could do it nothing but harm and that we had, up to now, shown a singular lack of intelligence in lightly casting aside the carefully considered work of our best dramatists, cutting it up into little pieces and putting it together again in short, jerky sequences which galloped along at a breath-taking pace, losing all the smooth flow and gradual dramatic accumulation of the original.

In this they were partly right, for one great fault of the early pictures was exaggerated speed, and I cannot assert with any conviction that all our adaptations of the period did full justice to the true dramatic value of the material. But at least we were on the right track in trying to develop our medium in terms of its own conditions, opportunities and limitations.

The gentlemen from Broadway, however, decided at once to disregard such picture technic as we had been able to evolve and to follow more closely their rules of the theater. They thought the whole idea was to photograph a play very much as it would be performed on the stage. They disdained the close-up method of telling a story, thereby losing that value of greater intimacy which is one of the screen's advantages over the stage. They played most of their scenes in long ensemble shots which, from a screen standpoint, left many of their characters out of the action at any given moment. In short, while being compelled to

retain all the liabilities of picture form, they rejected its few hard-won assets. In addition, they chose to keep all the limitations of stage drama although forced by screen conditions to lose the theater's most valuable elements, the living actor and the spoken word. Their experiments were not successful, largely, perhaps, because the public, having accepted a new technic for pictures, was not pleased by a reversion to theater methods in a medium which had already discarded them in order to find its own more appropriate form of expression.

If, as Terry Ramsaye has pointed out, the dramatic tense is the present tense, pictures had already scored an advance over the theater, where so much has to happen off-stage and be described in the past tense. In a picture nothing important happens off-stage; we are always there to see it happen—it is all present tense.

"Act, act in the living present," said Longfellow, and so receptive has the public been to this idea that today even the radio no longer uses the past tense. We hear the announcer saying: "The other day, a friend of mine said to me—" Then a lovely, homey, folksy, husky female voice cuts in: "My family always keeps asking me why I can't get my chocolate puddings four or five shades whiter. Well—" It is a radio fade-back, a technic borrowed from the films, its purpose being to keep action always in the present. So much has this become a part of our national psychology that modern printed advertisements tell a dramatic story in dialogue and picture, and we get quite a thrill out of seeing how a certain soap has made smooth sailing for young love about to go on the rocks, or how a particular beverage taken at night saves a home which otherwise would have been destroyed by insomnia. Such is the power of drama.

By the year 1920, actors and directors had been acknowledged as important elements in making motion pictures. It was only then that a general idea got about that perhaps the author might be an essential link in the chain of production. Our company, having been among the first to realize that the man who wrote the story of a picture was, after all, contributing something which might turn out to have value, now went in for authors in a big way. Other companies followed suit, and in an amazingly short time our little Hollywood filled up with most of the well-known writers of current English and American literature.

Few of them took the trouble to learn anything about the new medium in which they were working. Many of them, being good conversationalists, emptied their trunks and sold the accumulation of years. Among those in our studio who took the job seriously and really tried to learn a new technic of story-telling, were Sir Gilbert Parker, Edward Knoblock, W. Somerset Maugham, Cosmo Hamilton and Elinor Glyn. But even these accomplished writers were intoxicated by the freedom of screen style. Just because a picture could change its background every few seconds they tended to avail themselves of the opportunity until dramatic action was in danger of being entirely lost in physical movement.

This occurred in the first work I did with "Eddie" Knoblock when he was quite new to the screen and its ways. Although a dramatist of the top rank, Eddie couldn't resist using his new-found screen freedom to the limit.

Our picture was called "The Lost Romance," and Eddie had told me the story, as yet unwritten, just before I left for New York. It was rather a charming little tale, so I assigned an experienced scenario-writer to work with him

on the technical side and hied me East, expecting to find a finished script on my return.

What I did find was my young scenario-writer in tears and full of explanations. Mr. Knoblock was an important dramatist and had insisted on doing things his way, and who was she to say him nay?

I looked over the script. The first scene took place on a terrace: two men and a girl. The men are rivals and the girl shoots an arrow which lodges in the top of a tall tree. Both men seek to retrieve it and climb the tree while they discuss their personal situation. This scene results in a quarrel in the tree-top which continues on their way down, until they rejoin the young lady and everything is as it was before the arrow was shot. The whole episode could have taken place much more comfortably on the ground. The rest of the script followed the same mobile method; no conversation was ever allowed to develop where it had begun.

Somewhat perturbed, I sent for Eddie, who came into my office smiling.

"Hello, Bill," he greeted me. "How do you like my screen technic? Don't you think I've caught the idea?"

"You've certainly caught something, Eddie," I said, "but I'm not quite sure what. I confess I'm a trifle dizzy after reading your opus. Nobody ever stands still."

His face clouded. "But they all told me that movement was what was needed," he said sadly. "Isn't that what you wanted?"

"Up to a certain point, yes. But, after all, old man, there is a difference between Pavlova and a man with St. Vitus' dance, even though they both move."

"Oh dear!" he said, "I thought I was writing it for the screen."

"Well, you see, Eddie, I wouldn't have minded your put-

ting in everything including the kitchen stove if you just hadn't left out the story. In all the frenzied comings and goings I can't find any of the delightful charm of the tale you told me and which we bought: I can't even find the same characters or the same plot."

Eddie looked crestfallen. "What had I better do?" he asked.

"Put down on paper the story you told me," I said. "Put it down in detail and in any form you want, but forget screen technic. Write it in blank verse or poetic prose and I will protect your child. You see, Eddie, you have done to your own story just what authors so often accuse us picture men of doing. You've ruined its integrity and destroyed its personality. If *I* had done it to your work your screams could have been heard all the way to England."

He went away, mournfully, and three days later handed me the rescued yarn with all its original values restored, all its tenderness and delicacy. Later he became quite a gifted screen-writer. Perhaps this first experience showed him that screen-craft had more to it than met the casual eye.

It was several years after this that I did another Knoblock play, "The Faun," which had been a great stage success on Broadway with William Faversham in the name-part. It was really a delightful play—in the theater—and was my first and only attempt at fantasy on the screen. It taught me, very thoroughly, that the American picture public was not yet ready for whimsy; they wanted their screen drama to be as realistic as it could be made. That they still feel this way is evidenced by later and much better productions, such as "Outward Bound" and "The Ghost Goes West," neither of which succeeded nearly as well with the public as with the intelligentsia.

Nor is the general approval of "horror pictures" like

"Dracula" and "Frankenstein" really inconsistent with the people's firm resistance to the fanciful, for horror pictures invariably strive to be physically realistic and usually contain pseudo-scientific explanations to reassure those sturdy minds unwilling to accept anything which cannot be accounted for by a doctor, a chemist or an electrician.

"The Faun," as a character of Roman mythology who suddenly appears in the midst of a modern British family and finds himself unable to understand their reluctance to yield to natural impulse, was far too big a pill to swallow, even for those credulous souls who found it easy to believe that if a vampire bit you you became a vampire, and could only be cured of this distressing affliction by having your head cut off, under the proper circumstances, and a wooden stake driven through your heart. There was no medical, electrical or ecclesiastical explanation of a faun. He was just out—a complete foreigner.

It had been generally agreed that we could not under any conditions use the original title for the picture. Seven-tenths of our audience and nine-tenths of our exhibitors would think a faun was a baby deer. So, following the same line of thought which had turned "The Admirable Chrichton" into "Male and Female," we turned "The Faun" into "The Marriage Maker." We hoped that scholars in our audience would overlook the fact that marriage was not a fundamental part of faun psychology and realize that our whole purpose was the greatest good of the greatest number.

To play "The Faun" I had engaged Charles de Roche, a French actor of magnificent physique who had told me in confidence that he could do anything Doug Fairbanks could do. Agnes Ayres and Jack Holt were the two other principals, and Mary Astor, just beginning her screen career and breath-takingly beautiful, was my juvenile heroine.

I soon found out that one thing Fairbanks could do better than de Roche was to understand English. This made it necessary for me to dig out such French as I possessed, which was a curious mixture of La Fontaine and Montmartre. It seemed to work, even though I used such quaint phrases as: "*Entrez après le camera*," meaning that he was not to make his entrance until after the camera had begun to turn.

Poor Charles, however, had a difficult time in this production. He was in constant agony from the adhesive strips which gave him the faun's pointed ears. His costume, most of the time, was a bit of leopard-skin which was very little comfort on a cool morning or at night, on location. Then he broke a toe in leaping from a platform to the stage, but he went on with his part, broken toe and all. To cap the climax, when we were working one night "on the lot," which meant under the open sky, where all the big white bugs in California were attracted by our lights, one of these creatures, technically known as "buzzards," took refuge in Charles's ear and refused to go anywhere else but in.

Before Charles had time to go completely crazy I had succeeded in getting a bottle of olive oil on the set and poured an earful into him. After a few convulsive moments the buzzard ceased its explorations, and fifteen minutes later Charles resumed his love scene, working through the night until nearly dawn. The next day he came on the set proudly bearing as a trophy the dead body of the intrusive insect which had just been extracted from his ear by a doctor. Altogether his performance was as fine a bit of real trouping as I have ever seen. But all his heroism failed to make our audience faun-minded.

When the picture finally was released no one liked it ex-

cept my family (who insisted it was the best thing I had ever done), and a handful of sensitive folks who were probably "pixilated." The distance by which we missed our mark was revealed to me by one earnest exhibitor who wrote a forceful letter explaining that "the fairy idea" would have been much better if the faun had been played by a little girl. This whole experience helped me to understand why some successful plays are so difficult to adapt to the taste of a picture audience. Either the work must be so changed as to lose its identity, or it must be recognized at once as good theater but bad screen material.

"The Faun," perhaps in a very erudite way, was merely an indication of the passion which authors have for making characters of animals. Probably every director in the world has noticed the ghoulish glee with which writers introduce dogs, flies, monkeys, mice, bees, ants, fish and babies into their plots. They are so easy to write; so humorous on paper. A bee buzzes into the scene at exactly the right moment; an ant crawls upon the table exactly on his cue; a mouse dashes across the bed just as the lady is about to retire; these are incidents which no writer will omit if he sees his chance to work them in. What does he care how long it takes to make the fly drunk enough to crawl in the right direction and not take to the air? He doesn't have to direct the mouse, or make the baby stop crying and begin to smile. No; a simple sentence and it is done—as far as the writer is concerned. This is one great advantage which the author accepts as his special privilege. He gets away with it because the public loves animals on the screen and the director knows it. It is usually good picture, but it is one reason why directors frequently look a bit driven.

There is another advantage an author can take in the writing of a synopsis or "story-treatment." He can use an

apparently innocent phrase to cover a point of construction.

I found this out when I was making "Midsummer Madness" from a detailed synopsis written by Cosmo Hamilton. It was an adaptation to the screen of one of his own novels, and included a situation in which, after the seducer had persuaded the heroine to go driving with him, it was necessary to lay the seduction scene in a place where, at the crucial moment, the lady's eye might fall upon the portrait of her innocent child. Cosmo neatly arranged for this by writing: "Not by accident they find themselves in the husband's hunting lodge high up on the mountain." Then the charming and carefree author left for England.

It took more than a full reel of picture to dramatize those three inoffensive little words: "Not by accident."

CHAPTER XIV

In 1925, owing to differences of opinion in matters of policy, C. B. left Paramount and established the deMille studio in Culver City, where I joined him a year later as a director and associate producer.

It was something of a wrench for me to leave the Lasky studio where, for twelve years, I had watched the Company grow from its first crude beginnings to be the most powerful picture organization in the world, and had seen the studio transform itself from the old barn, paper dressing rooms, and tiny, roofless stage with no artificial light, into a plant which covered two tremendous blocks, with concrete buildings, huge steel and glass stages, comfortable paneled offices, streets of heavily-built outdoor sets and an enormous equipment of every kind of electrical lighting apparatus.

But times were changing; we were pioneers no longer. Those gay, adventurous days were gone forever. Company politics and industry reorganization, with the vast sums of money involved in production, had darkened the atmosphere. Our little frontier outpost had been overwhelmed by the city which had grown up around it. Our small advance guard had been broken up by promotion and each member of it was now leading a regiment of his own.

So once more I shouldered my pack and followed the trail C. B. had blazed until I came to his new camp. But this time I missed the thrill of pushing into an unknown wilderness. I was no longer an eager, young explorer; I was a veteran guide. I knew the passes through the mountains

and where the rivers could be forded. I could see no fine new country to explore. Like Columbus, I thought there was no land to the West but India, and I had started from India when I first went West.

The motion picture had finally been developed, I thought; there would undoubtedly be further technological progress, but what of that? As a form of drama it was pretty well set. There was nothing to do now but to go on making more pictures, using established methods and technic with such minor improvements as time might bring.

More pictures, and after that still more pictures. An infinite procession of silent shadows who could speak only in disconnected, staccato lines inscribed upon the film like epitaphs. Good stories, of course, made better pictures than bad stories; good direction got better results than bad; acting and personality varied in value but the steady growth of the art was, at last, practically stopped by its own limitations; it had reached the outer walls of silence.

I began to think of a dimly remembered place called Broadway, where living drama was produced in which the people of the play could express themselves fully, in speech which need not cease at the end of fifteen seconds; where the tone, phrasing and inflection of a line brought the inner meaning of a thought poignantly to life; where character could be etched with that sharpness and delicacy which the spoken word alone can give; where shades of emotion could be depicted which the living voice alone can show and, above all, where language itself, well used, clothed and beautified the spirit of the work, giving it an identity of its own, a personality which no collection of intermittent placards could even approximate.

For twelve years the public had eagerly endorsed every change in cinematic art and craft which led toward fuller

dramatic expression. The people wished to go still further toward an illusion of reality on the screen. But in what direction could they go? Color? Yes, color might be perfected but it could add only a superficial reality and, so far, had not even achieved that. A well-made photograph was much more real than a violent chromo. Grass could be made green, but the heroine's face in color still looked like a portrait of dear Mama painted by little Sally at the age of seven. And even perfectly tinted heroes could not express themselves any more subtly than could those in black and white. No, the road to *dramatic* reality could not be reached by coloring unreality. Neither would stereoscopic effect do more than emphasize the dumbness of the characters. The art of photodrama had reached locked gates which effectively barred its progress into the field of full dramatic expression. If those gates could not be unlocked the motion picture would have to remain where it was: a minor dramatic art, valuable chiefly for its accessibility to the millions but doomed forever to look with hungry eyes at that complete emotional and psychological revelation which is the true foundation of drama. Nothing we could do on the screen would give an audience the full value of Hamlet's soliloquy.

In April, 1928, I had just finished "Tenth Avenue," my forty-fifth production and was working on "Craig's Wife" with Clara Beranger, who had written the screen plays of all my pictures for seven years and continued to do so even after our marriage.

The Warner Brothers were opening their new Hollywood Theater with a picture called "Glorious Betsy" in which Conrad Nagel and Dolores Costello were featured and, as we had heard that there was some sort of newfangled sound effect connected with the production, I took

Clara along to see what it was all about. We knew, of course, that experiments were being made in talking pictures, but that sort of thing had been going on for years. In fact, I myself had lost a few hundred dollars to oblige a friend who had devised a film-phonograph combination which was very scientific and most interesting but which, unfortunately, never worked. Furthermore, we knew that the executive heads of all the big companies had looked into the matter and, with the exception of Warners and Fox, all had decided that talking pictures wouldn't go. The very leaders who, fifteen years earlier, had had vision and courage enough to fight for full-length feature films, now, with an airy wave of the hand, dismissed talking pictures as unpleasant and impractical. Thus does the daring young visionary of today become the safe, sane conservative of tomorrow.

We sat in the darkened theater and watched "Glorious Betsy" unwind herself. For several reels it was just a regular picture, the plot of which I have forgotten, but I shall never forget the moment when André de Segurola, playing the part of a military officer, stood in the middle of the picture to address the group around him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said.

He said!

A thrill ran through the house. The screen had spoken at last; an operation had been performed and the man, dumb from infancy, could talk. No one minded, at first, the gentle, crackling noise which pervaded the scene. It sounded like a grass fire, but it was to turn into a conflagration which swept away the Hollywood we had known and forced us to build a new city on the ruins of the old.

Many in that audience missed the full significance of what was happening. The voice was tinny, tubby and bel-

lowy in turn, but what did that matter? It had *spoken* to us from the screen; it had *said:* "Ladies and gentlemen."

Here was the key that would finally unlock those gates. I could feel them swinging wide apart and opening the road to a form of photoplay which could indeed be made a high dramatic art, even dramatic literature. The new craft would perfect itself in time; it would have to, for there was great need of it. Only perfection of the craft and a new technic in writing, acting and directing stood between the public and a potentially great form of universal drama. The public would feel that this was an advance toward something they needed and wanted. No matter how crude these first attempts, they were not as crude as the first silent pictures, and pressure by the people would force rapid improvement; their instinct would be truer than all the carefully-arrived-at decisions of the producers.

As I realized the future possibilities of what I was seeing and hearing, I felt a nervous quiver run through me: the quiver of an explorer who suddenly finds that new land has been discovered; an unknown continent suddenly revealed, which must be investigated, charted and developed. The nervous tension and sense of excitement which I felt on that night of April 26, 1928, was to last all through the first two hectic years of "sound."

I glanced at Clara. She, too, was feeling the importance of the moment. I whispered to her: "This is history, my dear; a new era," and she nodded without taking her eyes off the screen.

But it was crude. As the picture went on and the first thrill of it subsided, its faults began to be more apparent. We felt restricted movement in the characters as they were forced to maneuver in order to face an implacably fixed microphone. Poor Dolores Costello's excellent voice came

out at times as a deep, rich baritone, while Conrad Nagel thundered in a subhuman bass, like immortal Jove declaiming through the Holland Tunnel. When they whispered together confidentially the resulting sounds took me back to the old woodshed of my boyhood where the hired man wielded a mean saw. The rustle of Dolores' dress suggested the fevered panting of a yard-engine. The letters "s" and "f" in their speech sounded like tearing silk.

The audience, almost entirely professional and conscious of these defects, began to take the matter lightly; there were even some giggles, as a particularly vicious sibilant split the air. You could feel a sense of relief. So these were talking pictures! Well—the public would never take to them, with their croaky voices and false sound values. And where was the music? You surely didn't expect people to look at a motion picture without music! And what had happened to the camera work? It was terrible. Oh, it had to be shot through plate glass: that accounted for it. The producers were right, after all, in refusing to be interested in this sort of thing. You can't fool those wise, old birds; no sir, they *know*. The poor Warner Brothers might just as well sit down quietly and let the Sheriff catch up with them: they've run the man ragged, as it is, with their ledgers dripping red ink. This talking thing is just a last dying effort; now they're through.

As subsequent events proved, few of that gaily chattering crowd knew that they were looking straight into the eyes of fate; many of them were laughing at their doom.

Once more the public took charge of its own. The talkie was an immediate success with them. Of course there were many complaints about the imperfections of the novelty, but one fact became almost instantly apparent: if the pic-

tures could talk, they must talk. The convention of silence which had been accepted for so many years was now completely shattered. People are quite willing to go out of their way to converse with a dumb man and take great pains to understand his signs or to read the little notes he scribbles as his only means of expression. But the minute they know that a man can speak but won't, their whole attitude changes. What was an affliction becomes an affront. If he won't talk—to hell with him.

So it was with pictures. The great sound revolution of 1928 was sweeping and devastating, and found the industry, as a whole, utterly unprepared to cope with it. Few theaters had the necessary equipment to project sound pictures, and those that had were dependent upon such product as Fox and the Warners were ready to release. As the public took the bit in its teeth and grew more and more insistent upon the talkie, theaters fell over one another trying to get sound apparatus installed, but it was some time before the electric companies could supply their demands. Some eighteen thousand theaters were clamoring that they must have instant service; there were neither men nor machines enough to go round.

This case of love at first sight between the public and the talkie was a great shock to the whole industry as it then existed. How could producers be sure that it was not just a sudden fad, like miniature golf, which would sweep the country for a brief season and die completely, as suddenly as it had been born? If it was indeed to be the picture of the future, it meant that many millions of dollars in stages and equipment must, forthwith, be scrapped and many more millions immediately spent upon new buildings, new stages, new machinery, new lights, new cameras; in fact, the whole technical and mechanical side of picture-making

Early sound with immovable microphone. The camera is inside large box at right. The author is directing Ruth Chatterton in "The Doctor's Secret," 1928.

The author discusses a scene with H. B. Warner in "The Doctor's Secret," 1928.

would have to be entirely changed from top to bottom. And, in addition, the terrific cost of adding a vast, complicated and elaborate system of sound-recording to every studio was a problem which no company could face with equanimity.

The Warner Brothers' hair, which had been turning white during the last few years of adversity, now began to turn black again, while that of all executives of other companies either became gray overnight or fell out completely. If they made the wrong decision they would be more than ruined; they would be utterly annihilated. And if they waited too long to decide, and the public did permanently adopt this new type of picture as its chosen fare, they would be so far behind the procession that they might never catch up. It was a matter of life or death for them to be on the winning side—if they could only be sure which side that was.

All other problems ceased to exist in Hollywood, all other difficulties became mere child's-play. Silence or sound: that was the question which monopolized all conversation, dominated all conferences. Was this the revolution or just a putsch?

Actors, as a group, were almost all against the innovation. Those who had no voices (and there were many of them, alas!) began to realize the peril in which they stood. Those who were of the theater didn't like the sound of their own voices as recorded; which marks perhaps, if only for a brief period, the one time in history when this has happened. Both stage and screen actors, however, were unanimous in condemning the loss of excellence in photography which resulted when cameras had to be shut up in soundproof booths and were forced to shoot through windows. It was not so hard on the youngsters, the main volume of complaint coming from stars and leading men and women

who already had begun to regret that statisticians were aware of their birth-dates, and who relied upon expert camera work to erase the marks of time.

If the motion-picture industry as a whole had had power to decide this vital question, the chances are that talkies would still be in their infancy or, if perfected at all, would be held back from popular consumption in order to prevent wrecking the business as it was in 1928.

While the discussion was still young, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences held an important meeting which was attended by a large number of the most prominent picture people in Hollywood. One after another they arose and denounced the new invention as base, crude, unworthy and a menace to the marvelous art we had perfected. Even our first pioneer, D. W. Griffith, made an impassioned address urging that this noisy monstrosity be officially condemned by the Academy.

"Give us back our beauty," he pleaded; "what use are pictures unless they are beautiful? These chattering horrors will destroy all we have achieved in twenty years of hard work."

There was tremendous applause when he sat down. The membership of the Academy were distinctly with him. Only Conrad Nagel and I spoke words of hope. We both saw what it would mean to future picture drama if present faults could be corrected and spoken language added to the tools with which we worked to evoke emotion.

But neither producers nor members of the Academy were allowed to make the decision. Day by day, as more theaters were "wired for sound" and talking pictures became more accessible to the public, it became clear that even a bad talkie could draw people away from a good silent picture. Warners and Fox had more than a year's start on the field,

and they were doing the business. They had all the talkies there were, and the other companies soon found themselves fishing in a pool through which their more adventurous competitors had just dragged a large seine.

Through all that summer of '28 public pressure increased, until the distracted producers finally realized that this was no temporary fancy, but the dawn of a new day in pictures. The people had outvoted the industry and there was nothing to do but yield to the inevitable.

So after many sleepless nights the decision was finally made. We were all going to make talking pictures and might God have mercy on our souls, since none of us knew the first thing about them. Even C. B. wore a worried look and said: "It looks to me, Bill, very much as if we were all going to work for the electric companies." Nevertheless, he realized that, come what might, there was no help for it. It was a real case of *vox populi, vox Dei.*

Never had the united industry been called upon to make such drastic changes within itself, and it is no small credit to the leaders that, after the revolution was an accomplished fact and a new form of government established, those same leaders were, for the most part, still in control.

But at the beginning it was Judgment Day: many were raised up, but many others were cast down. We were all starting over again and all starting from scratch. It was a new school, in which there were no masters—there were only pupils; and while it seemed at first as though pictures were being taken back to a new infancy, this whole transition marked the beginning of an evolution which led to maturity; a maturity which the silent picture could never hope to reach.

The new infant "Talkie" was obviously a child of Mother Movie and Father Stage, but it was an unwanted

baby, disowned at first by both parents, who not only didn't like its looks but hated the sound of its lusty screams. Each, however, felt in duty bound to take charge of the brat and, for a year or two, there was bitter conflict as to which parent should control the youngster's upbringing.

Mother Movie didn't want baby to talk too much; she wanted it to use all the pretty gestures and posturings which she used when she was a girl; she didn't want it to lose the happy, carefree movements of her own youth. Father Stage, on the other hand, was all for language; he had been raised on it and knew all about it. Let the child stand still, if it must, but let it say what it meant. Why should it try to express itself by making faces and silly signs when it had a tongue in its head?

It took some time to adjust these conflicting viewpoints. Early conditions were such that the screen, in order to speak, had to lose its freedom of movement and much of its pictorial beauty. During this period it talked its head off; there was nothing else it could do, and consequently it imitated its father far too much for the good of its own personality. But as technicians gradually restored to the screen its own especial advantages, took the cameras out of their booths and put them on rubber wheels, and made the microphone so mobile and so flexible that all restrictions on stage-movement disappeared, we began to find that the intimate method of pictures makes fewer words necessary than on the stage, where the actor is always a long distance away from his audience and facial expression cannot be relied upon to convey subtle changes of thought. Valuable as words are when we need them, there still remains much drama which, though it must use language to reach an audience from the stage, can reach them from the screen through the eye alone. One vital difference between talking

pictures and stage plays is this change in the relative value of eye and ear; all stage plays talk too much for the screen; no screen play, as written, can be completely expressed from the stage.

But these principles were not at all clear to us in 1928 when our nice comfortable little world was suddenly turned upside down and we all lay flat on our backs listening to the voice of God speaking through a microphone.

Before the momentous decision had been made which changed so fundamentally our art, our craft and our lives, I had come to the conclusion that talking pictures were our future work; that they alone could lead us to real progress and a mature art. I had finished "Craig's Wife," which I felt in my heart would be my last silent picture, as indeed it was, and I wanted to learn something about the new game. I knew that Roy Pomeroy, of Paramount, had been working for some time on experiments in this field and, outside of the Fox and Warner Brothers experts, probably had a better grip on the subject than anybody in Hollywood. I had heard, too, that Paramount was about ready to try a little tentative sound in some of its pictures; they were willing to put one timid toe in the water just to see how cold it was.

Therefore, the day after I had put "Craig's Wife" to bed, I hied me over to Paramount and asked to see Jesse Lasky. As I entered his sumptuous office I noticed that he wore the hunted look which marked all picture executives of that period.

"Hello, Jesse," I greeted him. "Look, I wanna be a talkie."

He seemed a bit startled. "Well, you see, Bill," he said, "we're only experimenting. We're not organized yet."

"I know that," I replied; "that's why I'm here. I want to be in at the beginning."

"But, you see," he explained, "Roy Pomeroy is in charge of sound; he wants to direct and he's been working so hard at it that we've promised him he can produce the first talkie we make."

"Fine," I said. "How about making me his assistant?"

"But we can't pay you your salary for that."

"Okay by me," I said jauntily. "You pay me whatever you think is right. The point is, I know we've all got to learn the new game and I want to start pronto, under the best teacher I can find, and I think Roy's it."

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, Bill," said Jesse. "If you'll work as Roy's assistant on our first talkie you can direct the second as your own production."

So it was arranged and I went out to see Roy, whom I had known as C. B.'s assistant in charge of the special effects department in the old days. In fact, it was Roy who had worked out the crossing of the Red Sea and other marvelous effects in "The Ten Commandments."

I found him in the midst of a new world.

One of the stages had been made approximately soundproof, and within its enclosure Roy was king; even the heads of the Company had to ask permission to enter this sacred and mysterious domain, where strange and exciting miracles were being wrought. When the four-toned automobile horn had signaled for silence and the massive doors were closed, everyone in the building froze into immobility, hardly daring to breathe. A cough or a sneeze might cost several hundred dollars. There was no ventilation, and powerful lights soon made a Turkish bath of the place; the whole atmosphere was that of medieval necromancy.

Roy was most gracious in accepting me as assistant, and

devoted considerable time to my instruction during the next few weeks. Under his patient guidance I began to learn something about the horribly complicated processes which were to be our new working tools.

The place was full of electrical engineers whose word was law in matters pertaining to the sound-track. They had been trained by telephone companies and their sole idea was to get good telephonic quality into each voice. Dramatic realism meant nothing to their young but scientific minds. If two people talked at once, or even overlapped their voices, the engineers simply went mad. Clear, even enunciation at a fixed tone level was their goal, and the major battle of the first year was between directors who wanted realistic effects, and engineers who wanted standardized tone-volume with meticulous clarity. Of course, most of the directors failed to understand the electrical problem, just as the engineers ignored dramatic values. One director insisted on having his heroine scream at the top of her voice, and every time she did so she blew out a light-valve, thus putting the whole recording apparatus out of business. If the "mixer," or recording engineer, set his adjustment to get the scream, the rest of the scene was too weak to be used. It was quite hopeless to explain to the director that recording ranges were limited; he wanted his scream at full force. After blowing out seven light-valves a compromise was finally effected.

But within a year most of these technical difficulties had been solved. The same technicians who had tied the hands of art promptly began working to untie them. In an article I wrote in the fall of '28 I predicted that this would happen, and timidly suggested that when it did—perhaps within three years—the silent picture would have ceased to be. Which shows that even one who was an enthusiastic be-

liever in the new medium, completely underestimated the speed which popular demand would force upon improvement. What I had prophesied might occur in three years virtually took place within six months.

Long before most companies were equipped to make sound pictures the public's stampede to talkies left the producers in a tight spot. Millions of dollars had been invested in finished silent pictures which were on their shelves waiting to be released. But unless an exhibitor could advertise "Talking Pictures" in Brobdignagian signs at his theater door, it was difficult to get a corporal's guard inside the house. Any film which made a noise was salable; any that did not, was as archaic as Mr. Zukor's "Queen Elizabeth." Other millions were tied up in partly made productions which would have to be completed or written off as total loss.

The harassed and nervous magnates were in the same position as our British cousins just after they had made a lot of beautiful and expensive coronation souvenirs embellished with the name and head of Edward VIII. Only our case was worse, since no one wanted to buy a silent picture even as a curiosity.

Facing this horde of prematurely aged and implacably silent films, the desperate producers scowled at them as many a gangster chieftain has since scowled at his victims on the screen. "So you won't talk, eh?" they muttered, and promptly proceeded to do something about it.

There came into existence then a new kind of photoplay, undoubtedly the most detestable bastard of art upon which this long-suffering world has ever been allowed to gaze. It was known officially as a "part-talking picture" but in the bosom of the studio was always referred to as a "goat gland," the idea being that by injecting a little sound

into a normally silent picture, the poor old thing would be rejuvenated; kick up its heels and squeal with youthful ardor; said squeals permitting the monstrosity to be advertised as a "talking picture."

So eager was the public to hear human sounds coming from the screen that it didn't object very much to this abominable mixture of two opposing conventions. But Art, after taking a first look at her newest alleged offspring, gave one despairing shriek and fled in terror from Hollywood, to which she was only enticed back after the last goat gland had gone its way. That so many people were willing to accept, even temporarily, a picture play in which the characters were conventionally dumb in five reels, and almost viciously voluble in the sixth, relapsing once more into silence in the seventh, was a great comfort to those who were driven by necessity to sponsor these atrocities. It proved once more the patience of the majority with any new development which promises to lead them where they want to go. In pictures at least, many an artistic advance would die at birth, killed by the intelligentsia, if it were not for those who tolerantly support it during immaturity. And even as the public had nursed and protected the silent picture through all its early crudenesses, despite the raised eyebrows and curling lips of the aesthetic minority, so now, that same public clasped to its collective bosom the inconsistent, unbeautiful, raucous talkie, goat glands and all, feeling rather than knowing that it would ultimately justify their faith.

Stupendous as were the physical difficulties of changing, almost overnight, the whole technic of picture-making, they were no worse than the problems which producers had to face in the matter of personnel. The changes wrought by sound in our hitherto silent world were so drastic that

almost every person in the studios found his job affected by them. Even the electricians had to use different lights and place them differently, so that induced currents from arc lights would not affect the microphone. In fact, the whole basic scheme of lighting changed, within a few months, from arcs to incandescent lamps. The art departments had to construct sets with new materials which would absorb sound and not reflect it; one of our first phobias being echoes, which, apparently, those early mikes didn't like. We were told that echoes produced the "tubby" quality which deceives so many citizens as to the value of their voices when they practice singing in the bathroom. Also we had to keep our actors out of corners and doorways lest the fatal "tubby" results ensue. Many sets were made with cloth walls, skillfully painted to resemble plaster or stone. It was not an unusual sight to see a sound engineer and a director moving about the stage, snapping their fingers to test the merits of each spot for recording purposes. Later, of course, when mikes were improved, we got back our solid walls and didn't object to echoes. Cameramen had to learn new methods, as their cameras were now driven by motors, synchronized with the sound-track. The poor boys had to be shut up with their machines in air-tight booths for every shot, and if the scene was a long one, they emerged at its end, not only asphyxiated but parboiled as well.

The directors, too, had to learn an entirely new craft. Many of them had had no experience in the theater and had never dealt with the spoken word. Even those who had been trained on the stage had to adjust themselves to the necessities of recording, and one sometimes gave way to despair when his mixer rejected a scene because the actor had turned his head away from the mike in order to face the person he was addressing. After having spent years in

learning to direct exclusively for the camera, it was most confusing to work at the same time for such a stern task-master as "Iron Mike" proved himself to be. What was best for the camera was usually wrong for the stationary microphone. It was an impossible situation, which was solved only when technicians, gradually learning the needs of drama, devised mikes of greater range and delicacy, and made them emulate the traditional "little bird" which hovers wherever there is something to be told. Instead of having to take the actor to the mike, we were then able to take the mike to the actor.

An immediate result of the revolution was the importation of many directors from the New York stage, but comparatively few of these could adapt themselves to picture technic. They not only had to work under all the new conditions which were worrying us old-timers, but in addition had to learn the basic principles of silent pictures which remained fundamental in the new technic. We had not worked in vain through all those soundless years; pictures still demanded their own methods, and photographing stage plays, as such, still made bad screen drama. Of the few stage directors who really set out to study the motion picture as an art in itself, George Cukor, John Cromwell and Reuben Mamoulian are outstanding examples. But it is something of a tribute to the "old guard" that, in 1938, out of two hundred and forty-four recognized, active picture directors, only twenty-one were brought from the theater to the screen after the advent of sound, while one hundred and thirty-six were recognized picture directors before 1928. One amusing development of the new era was the wave of word-consciousness which immediately engulfed us. For years no one had paid any particular attention to language, either in grammar, pronunciation or enuncia-

tion; words had been left entirely to title-writers, who usually didn't decide upon them definitely until weeks after the scene had been taken. Now definitions, pronunciations and inflections suddenly became major problems, and everyone's favorite book was the dictionary.

Many battles took place between directors and English actors whose chief claim to culture sometimes lay only in their British accent, in order to persuade them to emphasize the second syllable of "precedence" or not to sound the "t" in "often." The actors fought bitterly for their own manner of speech, invariably taking refuge in the statement: "Everybody in England says it the way I do." A director of tact always yielded that point, but explained that this was an American picture and we had to talk American.

As to our own boys and girls, most of whom had had no stage training, the problem was frightful. They spoke in various kinds of lingo, from the rolling "r" of the rolling prairie to the classic "oi" of pure lower Manhattan. In addition, syllables, consonants and even inconvenient vowels were to them merely conventional signs, not to be taken seriously. They used such sentences as: "The Gover'ment is gonna do some in'eress'in' things in Feb'uary," and got upset if the director grew fussy. In contrast to these were others who set about cultivating what they fondly believed was an "English accent," and grew so precious in their use of words that they insisted upon saying: "Something has come between he and I," because they had been taught to regard "him and me" with suspicion.

The writer's problem was also a grave one. Many of our best screen-playwrights could not write good dramatic dialogue, and even for those who could there was still a brand-new kind of photoplay to be developed. There were no accepted forms, no models to follow. How much or how little

dialogue should be used was a matter of future experiment. Some few there were who had written both for stage and screen, and these bore the brunt of the first months, but there wasn't nearly enough man-power to supply the demand. Other writers had to be called in and, for the second time in its history, Hollywood was gorged with famous dramatists and novelists.

Screen-writers whose dialogue was not brilliant were combined with dialogue-writers who didn't know the screen. If the story-construction didn't satisfy an associate producer, one or two more screen-writers were called in to reconstruct it. If the dialogue looked capable of improvement, two or three more dialogue-writers were told to go quietly to work on it without letting anyone know. It was not unusual to have as many as eight or ten writers creating the same picture at the same time. It remained for director and actor between them to make one definite character out of five different authorial conceptions.

As a result, the writer naturally lost his sense of artistic responsibility. Constantly rewriting the work of others and knowing that his own work, in turn, would be changed and changed again, he simply did the best he could and took comfort in his salary. Even today the system of multiple authorship continues, which means that in working for the screen, the author as a rule has nothing to gain but money.

It began to look as though talking pictures were going to add all the problems of the theater to those of the screen; and as a great many directors were considered to be incapable of shouldering this added responsibility, executives decided to take charge themselves. The associate producer was henceforth to be the sole head of his picture, and writers and directors were to work under his orders. With the exception of a few producer-directors who act in both capaci-

ties, that is the way pictures are made today. That they are constantly improving in quality is probably due to the little group of directors who still govern their productions and to certain producers who are wise enough to engage good artists and let them work without undue interference. After all, there can be genius in the field of the executive-producer too. Also, some twenty-four screen-writers have, in the last few years, become associate producers, an indication that creative ability is not an insurmountable bar to production authority.

Of all the various groups who found themselves vitally affected by this sudden transformation of the whole industry from silence to sound, none felt the change as much as did the actors. Almost everyone else could adapt his work to meet new conditions, but many an actor found himself ruined; not only the little fellow, mind you, but a large number of Hollywood's most important figures. As if shell-shocked producers hadn't already enough on their minds to cause complete insanity, it was seen at once that there would have to be a new deal for stars and leading players. Stars who held expensive contracts and in whose building-up hundreds of thousands of dollars had been expended might prove to be utterly without value when they had to use their voices. This was a serious problem indeed for the companies, but it was an agonizing heartbreak for those stars who were at the height of their success in April and heard themselves condemned to professional death before Christmas. Gallant enough they were, these unfortunates; they worked frantically at voice-training and diction; those with foreign accents strove valiantly to overcome them, but found, only too often, that it was hopeless. Through no fault of their own they were finished, washed up, out. The gaiety and glitter of Hollywood were theirs no longer; the

adoring crowds would soon forget that they had ever lived; their gorgeous homes with swimming pools and tennis courts would pass into the hands of others who had the right voices. It was tough. Not a few of them died, still hoping for a comeback, relics of a voiceless era which had come to a definite end.

We had become so used to the silent personalities of our players that it was a shock to realize how completely a voice may change the quality of an individual; make him, in effect, an entirely different person; suggest a character utterly foreign to the one of whom we have grown so fond. Even a technically good voice may still be in sharp conflict with the identity established in our minds by the silent figure on the screen.

It is for this reason that Charlie Chaplin will never let his adorable little tramp acquire a voice. Charlie is a wise showman, and knows that no voice with which he could endow the little fellow would adequately express the character which so many millions of every race in the world have grown to love. To the French he is a Frenchman, as he is a Russian in the Soviet Union. If he ever spoke he would lose his personality and become much more finite, less universal. Chaplin himself may use his excellent voice to speak to us from the screen some day, but it will be in another character; the little tramp of all the world will remain silent forever.

It was quite natural that as the coming of sound cast some actors into outer darkness it raised others into the light. Even as certain voices destroyed the glamour of a personality, others gave power and character which the silent screen could not convey. Most actors of stage training found their value doubled when they could add vocal art to pantomimic.

Conrad Nagel was one of these, his rich, musical voice

and intelligent reading giving his personality a force and a punch which he had never quite attained in silent days. In fact, Conrad became so much in demand that he could have worked in ten talkies at once had he been two sets of quintuplets.

Jack Gilbert, on the other hand, was one of those whose voices did not fit the personalities their audiences had imagined them to be. It was not that Jack's voice was bad; it wasn't. It just was not the voice his audience had heard in their minds in "The Big Parade," or the voice that made love to Garbo in "The Flesh and the Devil." Without his voice he was the screen's great lover of his day; with it he lacked that special charm which had carried him on the crest of the wave for more than five years.

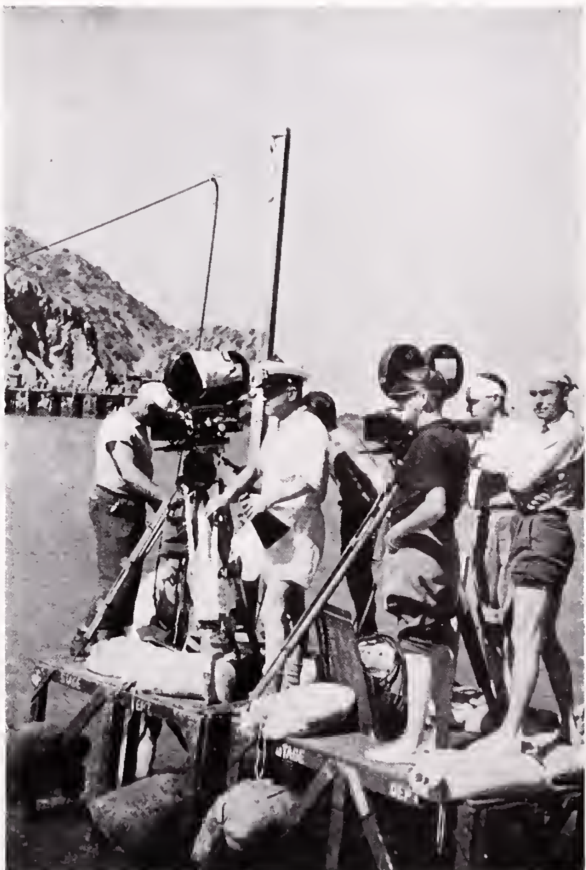
This was not fickleness on the part of his audience. People wanted him to be what they had thought he was when they couldn't hear him. When he turned out to be someone else, they were just as disappointed as he was; they couldn't help it any more than he could. It was cruel, but there wasn't a single thing anyone in the world could do about it. There was plenty of real tragedy in Hollywood in '28 and '29.

Another great loss to the screen was the beautiful and accomplished Vilma Banky, who found it impossible to overcome her Hungarian accent. One of the most charming actresses ever brought from Europe to Hollywood, Vilma was forced to retire at the age of twenty-five, before her art had even reached its maturity. Rod LaRocque also found the going difficult at first, in spite of a perfectly good voice and enunciation; one more case of a vocally changed personality. Emil Jannings gave up without a struggle, having spent most of his spare time in America hobnobbing with Hollywood's German colony and not having troubled to

Kay Francis (above) and Kay Johnson in "Passion Flower," 1930.

C.B. aloft on Camera-boom directs in the heat. "The Buccaneer," 1937.

Photo by the author.



C. B. and Camera Crew prepare to shoot "water-stuff." "The Buccaneer," 1937.

Photo by the author.

learn more English than he needed for silent pictures. Norma Talmadge, Colleen Moore and Marie Prevost were only a few of many other stars and near-stars who, under the new requirements, had to vacate their seats among the mighty. The carnage was terrific, and for more than a year Hollywood had a distinct case of the jitters. It was almost like waiting for a squadron of enemy bombing planes to appear suddenly overhead. No one knew where the next bomb would fall or who would be among the casualties. No one's position was secure until his work had been retested and submitted anew to the public for approval.

I remember well what tension there was on the lot when Garbo's first talkie, "Anna Christie," was ready to be previewed. No one knew what would happen. Jack Gilbert's fate had already been decided, and Garbo was Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer's most valuable star at the moment. Garbo had been working her head off trying to lose her strong Swedish accent but it was not yet all gone. Then there was the quality of her voice: low-pitched and husky though not without beauty. Would "they" like it? Would it add to her appeal or detract from it? Luckily for Miss Garbo, the studio and everyone concerned, the audience was thrilled by her voice from its first deep tone and fell in love with her all over again. She was one of those who by indefatigable work and sheer determination was able to conquer almost impossible obstacles. But work and determination would have been all in vain if the public had not felt that her voice "fitted" the personality they knew so well.

A proof of Garbo's conscientiousness in all matters concerning her work is to be found in one of her more recent films, "Camille." In this picture the lady deliberately lost twenty pounds during the course of its shooting, in order to make more convincing the heroine's decline in health.

Here, at least, is one advantage the screen has over the stage, as no "Camille" in the theater's history has ever been able to die at eleven o'clock weighing twenty pounds less than she did at eight-thirty; and even if she could, the lost displacement would all have to be regained by the following evening. Under such circumstances the very thought of a matinée-day is staggering.

It was "Anna Christie," by the way, which brought that splendid old trouper, Marie Dressler, once more to the front. Able to use her voice again, she swept into a stardom which brought to a triumphant close her long and honorable career, which had seen many a depression. The talking picture allowed her to be herself, and herself was what the people loved.

During the chaos in which Hollywood found itself when Western Electric came down like a wolf on the fold, one of our handsome young leading men happened to meet me on the lot, his hair disheveled, his face grim and a stormy look in his eye. He was a chap who had worked in several of my pictures, so I stopped him to inquire what the trouble was.

"I've been to the front office," he said. "They want me to make one of these talkie things and I've just told 'em that I'd be damned if I do."

"I very much fear, Richard," I said gently, "that you'll be damned if you don't."

"Oh no," he sputtered, "not me! I've got a contract and there's nothing in it about talking. They can't make *me* talk."

"Of course they can't," I soothed; "but what's your objection?"

"Everybody's voice sounds rotten," he complained. "The whole thing is just a fad; it won't last, and I'm not going to

get up there on the screen and be laughed at: no sir, they can't make *me* talk."

"Lad," I said, in a fatherly manner, "you've been on the stage, you've got a good voice and you can read lines. You don't know how lucky you are. Their problem is trying to make people talk who *can't* talk. And I think you're wrong about its not lasting. Long before you're an old man there won't be any more silent pictures; so unless you intend to change your profession you'd better climb on the band-wagon while the climbing's good."

"But they sound perfectly lousy."

"That won't last forever," I said. "Thousands of scientists, with all the resources of the big electric companies behind them, are sitting up nights, planning how to do justice to your voice. You'd better talk, and like it, Richard; you'll be silent a long time after you're dead."

He looked thoughtful. "Well—I'll think it over," he said.

It seems amazing that with the water rising all around them, a foot an hour, so many people didn't know there was a flood. The panic came later, when they found out that the dam had burst.

Gloria Swanson, who was one of the reigning queens of Hollywood when the electric bolt struck our happy home, was so terrified at the thought of using her voice that she had great difficulty in making a sound-test. Her voice was really good, but she had never used it in her work, and she developed such a case of "mike-fright" that, no matter how well she knew her lines, she "dried up" completely whenever she faced the crucial moment of actual recording and couldn't remember a word. She tried and tried, but always with the same result; she would rehearse perfectly and then go all to pieces when she knew the dreaded mike was alive

and listening. As it was only a test, and something drastic had to be done, the problem was finally solved by writing her lines on the shirt-bosom of the actor who played opposite her. With this added support she got through successfully, and once the bridge had been crossed she had no further trouble. Her picture, "The Trespasser," showed that she was entirely adequate to the new medium.

Another young actress, whom I had directed many times with delight in her work, realized that her voice and manner of speaking would impose limitations on the kind of part she could play. Having been an important leading player in silent films she did not relish the thought of being confined to "character" parts, so she calmly waited upon the head of her studio and informed him that she was not going to make any more pictures.

The executive, one of the most important in the industry, promptly hit the ceiling. "Whadda you mean, you're going to quit?" he stormed. "You can't break your contract."

"Oh, yes I can," she smiled. "There's a clause in it that lets me."

"If there is," shouted the mogul, "I'll fire everybody in the legal department. What is it?"

"Well," she said demurely, "it says in the contract that it can be broken by an act of God. Now, a New York millionaire has just asked me to marry him, and if *that* isn't an act of God I don't know what you'd call it."

And she got away with it.

These are only a few of the incidents which stand out in my memory as marking the great change to sound. There is no space to tell of the thousands of tragedies which befell the lesser people of Hollywood. Visually lovely girls who talked through their noses; silent heroines with adenoids or squeaky, tinny voices; young women who could no longer

play New York society girls because of Kansan intonations; splendid young heroes whose enunciation was lingual goulash; strong he-men of the open spaces whose vocal efforts sounded like the wood thrush calling to its mate. Their professional lives had all been wrecked by the little iron mike which now hung so unobtrusively on every set.

It was Judgment Day indeed, and our little world had been turned upside down.

To the craft of photodrama the change, as it developed, brought a new freedom, greater power, deeper meaning. Now that the screen could speak, it would soon have to have something to say. It would, in growing degree, have to assume the responsibilities of a form of dramatic literature. It meant real progress toward a higher form of art.

Our work and our lives had all been changed within the space of a few months. To many, the transformation brought new opportunities, advancement, success. To many others, God help them, it brought oblivion.

CHAPTER XV

ALTHOUGH the decision to change its product from silent films to sound had been definitely arrived at by the whole motion-picture industry before the end of 1928, there was bound to be a chaotic condition while this transformation was taking place. All the companies had suddenly ceased to make silent pictures but most of them had very few talkies to offer their customers, besides which, most of the theaters were not yet equipped to project sound films. This condition of affairs put the already groggy producers in another tough spot, with half their paying clientele demanding talkies only, and the other half cursing Fate that they were still compelled to show nothing but silent pictures, which presented a sales problem comparable to marketing burnt-out electric bulbs.

To meet this emergency and keep the little fellows in business, a new atrocity appeared in the form of talking films which had had their vocal cords removed and old-style printed titles substituted; talkies transformed back into silent pictures. These little foster brothers of the goat gland succeeded in combining within themselves all the faults of both the silent and the talking film, without any of the advantages of either. They were about as entertaining as a silent picture of an orchestra playing a symphony, accompanied by placards describing the music's meaning. No one liked them; but no one was supposed to like them. They were as atavistic as Jo-Jo, the dog-faced boy, but they did succeed in keeping smaller theaters going until Western

Electric or R. C. A. had time to galvanize them once more into life. Like their predecessors, the goat glands, these voiceless talkies were only meant to bridge the gap between silence and sound.

During the early months of the revolution I was being educated in sound-film technic by Pomeroy, while helping him make the first all-talking picture to be released by Paramount. It was called "Interference," and introduced to the microphone William Powell and Clive Brook, both of whom I had directed months—or was it years—ago, in the days of silence. It seemed strange to us all to work once more with fully spoken sentences, after so many years of monosyllable and pantomime. We had been dwelling so long in a foreign land that we had almost forgotten how to use our own language.

Once "Interference" was "in the can," I was assigned to adapt and produce Sir James M. Barrie's "Half an Hour," Paramount's second talkie. It was just like old times when we changed its title to "The Doctor's Secret," the boys in the distribution department holding that no picture audience would buy any half-hour unless they had reason to believe that it contained something juicy. Every prospective customer, realizing what his doctor knew about him, would be eager to pay a quarter to learn what the doctor knew about someone else. That, at least, was the theory.

I was most fortunate to have as my three leading players such masters of the spoken word as Ruth Chatterton, H. B. Warner and Robert Edeson, each of them having been a star in the legitimate theater, and all of them having had thorough training on the screen.

To have Bob Edeson play the doctor was to have history repeat itself, for, just twenty-three years earlier, Bob had given me my first success on Broadway, when he created the

name-part in my play "Strongheart." This work, by the way, was produced many years before one of Hollywood's most popular actors, a German police dog, took the same name and carried it to real fame; so much so indeed, that when the play was finally put upon the screen we had to abandon its title so as not to disappoint millions of the younger generation who would purchase tickets expecting to see their canine hero. The animal had completely devoured my beloved Indian youth. *Cave canem.*

As I look back upon those hectic days of transition, it seems almost impossible that within two years the whole industry was able to make itself over into something entirely different. Massive, concrete, soundproof stages were built almost overnight and filled with a bewildering assortment of complicated instruments hitherto unknown to us: new types of cameras, new kinds of lights and, above all, the complex apparatus of sound-recording. New methods of directing, acting and writing developed immediately, and improved with a rapidity which was breath-taking. Mistakes were quickly recognized as such, and in an incredibly short time the new form of photoplay took shape and established its own technic.

Within two years our little old Hollywood was gone, and in its place stood a fair new city, talking a new language, having different manners and customs; a more terrifying city, full of strange faces, less friendly, more businesslike, twice as populous and much more cruel. With the added responsibility of language, motion pictures had become more difficult to make, as well as much more expensive. A major studio now had sixty-eight highly organized departments, and it required the services of fifty craftsmen to take a simple shot of two people talking. Only two short years had passed since Pomeroy glowed with pride when he actu-

ally cut the sound-track from long-shot to close-up; and now the lads in the sound department were nonchalantly cutting one word out of a sentence and substituting another. Two years, and not a theater in the country showed silent pictures; the whole nation had practically forgotten that silent pictures had ever existed.

One thing the public taught us right from the beginning: if pictures were going to talk, they must speak a language which would seem real to the audience. The intimate methods of the screen forbade theatricality either in speech or in acting. With that quickness to learn which is characteristic of the American picture public, our audiences soon became extremely sensitive to anything which suggested the old sock and buskin days of the theater. They were keen to spot time-worn phrases or artificial expression. From now on, language on the screen would have to ring true, and acting would have to be natural and not stagy. This was especially true of tense dramatic moments, in which the slightest touch of stilted or flowery phrasing would bring forth from the spectators loud bellows of unholy glee. Love-making. in particular, had to be restrained in expression or be laughed off the screen. Picture audiences are much more self-conscious in emotional crises than is the average theater audience, and dialogue-writers have to watch their steps with great care or suffer the penalty of unexpected merriment. Thus the talking picture, almost from its birth, and under no other influence than public reaction, automatically joined the modern school of expression exemplified by John Erskine's "Helen of Troy" and Robert Sherwood's "Road to Rome," a school which rejects the Victorian method of using quaint and archaic speech to preserve an air of antiquity in its characters; which realizes the absurdity of trying to make Helen or Hannibal at the same time both real

and remote. The great mass of American picture-goers know by sheer instinct that if they are to accept a character as real, he must speak a language which they themselves feel to be real; they do not want any "Gadzooks" or "Odds-bodikins" in theirs. And this popular insistence on simple, clear-cut language of our own day is helping the talking picture develop into true national contemporary drama.

The Hollywood of today is popularly supposed to be a community of unconventionality, of individualism and of general personal freedom; just a gay carefree lot of youngsters having a perpetual good time. But a glance beneath the surface of the gaiety soon convinces a careful observer that in Hollywood, as in other places, conformity rules with an iron hand. If you would be considered a part of it you must follow its customs; if the fashion is unconventional clothing you, too, must wear it or be thought of as a reactionary. You must go to the Hollywood Bowl on nights of special importance or get a reputation for being "snooty." You must attend the short season of grand opera, when there is one, or have it said that you shirk your duty to represent the industry. You must drive a costly car and live expensively or be condemned as unimportant or, worse yet, as reflecting upon the studio which pays you so generously.

Above all, you must go to Sunday cocktail parties, particularly those given by prominent executives, where nothing is talked but shop and nothing is played but cards. For there are one or two of these masters of destiny whose social charm lies largely in their power to make finding a job difficult for anyone who fails to be impressed by their wit and culture. Needless to say, their parties are never ill-attended and their stories find an appreciation seldom accorded to other illustrious raconteurs.

There is a Hollywood legend about a certain poker game

which occurs from time to time among a selected group of overlords. During the game, it is said, various personalities are weighed and discussed, not only in regard to their work, but also as to their politics and their willingness to conform or, as the industry naïvely puts it, to "co-operate." It is believed that these six or eight men virtually determine, over the green cloth, who shall or shall not work in pictures.

Of course this legend has never been verified: who would take seriously a little friendly chat around a card-table? And, after all, they're only playing for chips. I have myself heard several people allege that a supposed "black list" was keeping them out of a job. This, of course, is absurd: obviously there could be no such thing, because it is against the law. What the unfortunate jobless one mistakes for a black list is nothing in the world but an accidental though sudden unanimity of opinion as to the need of his services.

Only a few rugged souls have dared to be nonconformist in the new Hollywood; a very few, who are, for the present, too valuable to lose, have dodged the headsman's ax; one of them, Greta Garbo, has actually succeeded in capitalizing her passion for social seclusion. As against these heroic figures, there are hundreds who built expensive houses at places like Malibu Beach, on land which they could not buy but had to lease for a limited period. Certain important people went there first because they liked it; most of the others have gone to be near the important people. It is the thing to do. With all of California to choose from, they have built houses so close together that you cannot be sure whether you are eating your own or your neighbor's dinner. Miles of virtually vacant beach stretch to north and south of them . . . but they choose to live with their elbows through one another's windows. It is a badge of rank to be a member of the colony, well worth the twenty-five mile

drive to and from work every day. It is a shanty-town de luxe, where each shanty costs at least twenty-five thousand dollars. Yes, Hollywood has its own glittering forms of bondage. It is hard to find the right word to describe them; the one which comes to mind is "delovely."

One virtue which is highly prized and much talked about in Hollywood, is "loyalty"; by which is meant a love and devotion carried to the point of sacrifice which every employee is expected to feel for the employer who pays him. This is a most important matter when times are hard and everyone is asked to show his loyalty by accepting a salary cut. Producers, of course, are equally loyal, and I have heard one of the biggest, speaking with tears in his eyes to a mass-meeting of the studio personnel, begging them to help him tide the company over a financial stringency, and nobly offering to cut his own immense salary drastically, as an example and pledge of good faith. It was not affection alone which made the workers consent to follow suit: their decision was aided by the knowledge that "disloyalty," in times of stress, is most unlucky for the individual who suggests that, after all, a contract is a contract; when better times appear once more, he is apt to be far away from Hollywood.

One or two employees may even have realized that when money was lopped off their own salaries it was gone forever, but when it was taken from the producer's weekly check in the same proportion, it finally came home to roost in the shape of profits and bonuses. In fact, if the producer had been able to achieve a fifty per cent cut among the loyal comrades, he could easily have cut his own salary down to zero and, by so doing, very probably have tripled his yearly income. Still, his speech on Loyalty was extremely moving and, in its climax particularly, suggested

the Gettysburg oration. Loyalty must not be allowed to perish from the earth, even though in certain cases it may look just a trifle unilateral.

In spite of all these amusing idiosyncrasies, the real importance of Hollywood has grown steadily as its mission in life became more definite and its value to the people more recognized. The place is dominated by the motion picture as it never was in days of old. Artists, writers and musicians from every land are called to add their quota to the work and as soon as they arrive they fall under the spell. They are there for pictures and they can think and talk only about pictures. Hollywood as an institution is a new melting-pot which takes all the arts of the world and fuses them into a strip of celluloid. Its democracy is amazing; the same film which carries to the public part of a Beethoven symphony, conducted by Stokowski, may also include the performance of a group of trained seals. A picture based on an outstanding hit of the New York theater may show, through the window of its stage-setting, part of the actual British coronation procession. Nothing is impossible, and the harder a thing is to achieve the more desirable it is for the screen. The major events of human civilization, as well as actual life in Arctic wastes or tropical jungles are all captured and brought to the studio, to be combined and molded into drama for the people.

Hollywood is a crazy place but you can't help loving it, with its warmth, color, excitement and semitropical lure. Hollywood Boulevard today is a strange mixture of Coney Island and the Arabian Nights. It is a little self-conscious perhaps, and it does like to show itself off. Half-clad beauties roam the Avenue, and youths in chromatic slacks with shirts well open to the breeze—all making obvious efforts to look nonchalant and quite at home; all hoping to be mis-

taken for "picture people," which few of them are. Only the tourists are fooled; they forget that Hollywood is the town of make-believe.

Even domestic employees are not unaware that they, too, are part of the show. I had a chauffeur once, who cherished the fond idea that he looked like Adolphe Menjou, and was forever making opportunities to drive my car down the Boulevard in order to encourage the mistake. If he saw only one tourist point him out to another, he was in ecstasy for a week; at such moments I think he really believed himself to *be* Menjou; which is the penalty one pays for living in an illusion factory.

If you are "in pictures" your household help doesn't mind how much you entertain, as long as your guests are "names." They delight in serving those whose work, they feel, is done to serve them. A Justice of the Supreme Court, as a guest, makes much less impression upon them than does Myrna Loy. Every houseboy and every maid knows that it only costs twenty-five cents to reverse the position and have these brilliant celebrities striving to entertain them. They feel a proprietary interest in the famous ones; they are patrons and critics of those they wait upon. Also, it gives them much caste among their friends to be able to recount, at first hand, dinner-table conversations of popular favorites. They are "in pictures" too, even if somewhat vicariously, and they get the same thrill out of it as the rest of us.

If you make a picture of which your domestics do not approve you feel the results immediately. Nothing is said, of course, which fact is significant enough in itself, but you feel the soft-footed boys moving about as if the corpse were laid out in the butler's pantry. You, their trusted leader, have played them false; have led them into a trap. How on earth can they ever explain it to their friends?

The personal interest which your retainers take in your guests sometimes threatens household discipline. I remember that whenever blonde and beauteous Phyllis Haver graced our board, my two Filipino houseboys were so entranced they could hardly serve dinner, and as Phyllis regaled us with stories of professional mishaps and predicaments the progress of the meal was frequently interrupted by one or both boys diving for the kitchen to avoid joining in our laughter.

Upon another occasion I told Amando, the number one boy, that Charlie Chaplin was coming to dine with us that evening. Much to my surprise, he received the news impassively.

"What's the matter, Amando?" I asked. "I thought you'd be tickled to death to have Mr. Chaplin here."

"Oh, sure, sure," he sighed; "Mr. Chaplin, he's fine, but he been here two, three time. I much rather have Marie Dressler."

Such a point of view, so frankly expressed by my faithful Amando, could, I suspect, exist only in this one little town on the desert's edge; a funny, depressing, stimulating, half-mad, half-tragic, fascinating place, filled with all sorts of people, whose daily comings and goings are printed in every news-sheet of the land and who are all working together to feed the imagination of a whole world.

That the speaking screen of today is striving valiantly to be worth while, no one can doubt who knows what is happening in the studios. The time spent upon story and research, the thousands of workers who contribute to every major picture, the endless quest for better material, the blood, the sweat and the money which go into the making of every first-class film—all of these bear witness that no effort is being spared to produce better results. If all pic-

tures are not as good as some pictures, the fact merely indicates that there is an art involved. In the manufacture of automobiles, quality depends largely upon cost; within a given price-range one car is practically as good as its competitors. But in the production of motion pictures this is not at all true: a picture which cost only two hundred thousand dollars may prove to be more powerful, more successful and much more profitable than another film which cost eight times as much.

Human values are essential elements which cannot definitely be appraised in advance or measured by cost. Of a hundred associate producers not all can be geniuses; and in any dramatic art not even a genius can always be at his best.

But standards are rising with remarkable speed, and if there are still a number of inferior pictures, the producers, as a group, are probably no more to blame than is that large section of the public which demands double-feature bills in its local theaters. This evil was first brought about during hard times by frantic efforts of certain exhibitors to attract audiences by offering them two shows for the price of one.

Once this precedent was established, the harm was done, the fat was in the fire and the thrifty army of bargain-hunters all over the country refused to return to those good old days when one admission entitled them to one feature picture only. Competition has carried the custom like a plague through the land, so many there are who think they benefit by seeing two bad pictures instead of one good one. In time they may realize that this does not give them more for their money, but less; for the number of good stories available to the screen is not nearly as great as the number of pictures necessary to supply public demand. Fewer pictures would undoubtedly make better pictures the rule rather than the exception. Also, two pictures for one admis-

sion means that the two can only cost as much as one of better quality.

In this case it seems that the people are not working, as they usually do, for the betterment of pictures; they are causing an overproduction of films which forces before the cameras many weak stories, hurriedly shot and inadequately played. It is unjust to blame producers for this condition: all the more important studios would like to abandon the making of "Class B pictures," as they are called, and confine themselves to producing only the better features. But as long as enough people want double bills, theaters will have to show them and producers will have to make them. Nor should the more aesthetic complain if the industry finds it impossible to give them two two-million-dollar pictures for forty cents.

Actually, "Class B pictures" are nothing but a commercial problem and need not be taken into account in considering the screen's advance as shown by its more ambitious efforts.

To those who can see no artistic merit except in the living theater, it is well to point out that if the percentage of total failure were as great on the screen as it is on the stage, the motion-picture industry could hardly survive a year.

One group of critics frequently heard, continues to blame the screen for not discussing deeper problems of present-day life. They accuse the groping cinema of being nothing but ten thousand boys meeting ten thousand girls. Their argument, reduced to a simple formula, is that the motion picture should stop talking to its own audience and talk to *them* instead. This might benefit the screen culturally, but it has always proved to be disastrous financially; possibly because those who denounce pictures most bitterly seldom pay for their seats.

In any case, the accusation is unfair. Producers have been willing, from the beginning, to take chances on subjects which they believe will strengthen the dignity of the screen, but they dare go only as far as the people will support them. No company is strong enough to stand many million-dollar failures, nor is it of the slightest use to blame the public for insisting upon entertainment rather than education. This is a problem which the stage has always had to face, and the screen must face it now to an even greater degree, as its audience is more general. If a show is only moral and cultural, educational and artistic, the mass of our fellow citizens will treat it as though it were rat poison. If it is entertaining, they will throng to it though it may lack all other virtue. The function of stage and screen alike is first, last and all the time, to entertain. Educational and artistic values are unobjectionable, but not at all fundamental or even necessary. Little boys and girls never like to eat things which are "good for them," and the great majority of all theater audiences are like little boys and little girls. They are paying for enjoyment, not for mental or spiritual benefit. If they are told that they *ought* to see a show, that it will improve their minds and bolster up their knowledge, then that is the one show they will avoid. In exchanging their hard-earned cash for theatrical enjoyment they only go to what they ought to when they have to; at all other times they go to what they want to.

It is this very quality in our audience which prevents the American screen from being debased into a mere battleground of conflicting propaganda. The motion picture is such a powerful means of conveying ideas that every fanatic in the country is eager to make it express his own opinion or theory. As our screen is still free to portray anything (as long as it cannot possibly offend anyone), our only protec-

tion from being bored to death by torch-bearers is the gentle insistence of our people that they be entertained. Either side of a question may be presented if it is made dramatically interesting: thus in "The Birth of a Nation" the Ku Klux Klan turned out to be the hero, while in "The Black Legion" it was decidedly the villain. "Fury" was a social document directed against a present-day evil; but "Fury" was also a gripping yarn. "The Story of Louis Pasteur" was educational, but no one minded because it was the eternally interesting fight of light against darkness, exemplified by drama instead of dogma. "San Francisco," "The Good Earth," "The Plainsman" and "Captains Courageous," to name only a few, were all works which dealt either with history, economics, or man's struggle against Nature, but in viewing these films the audience never suspected, until the next day, that it was being educated.

"Romeo and Juliet" gave many millions their first sight of a Shakespeare play, and even though *Variety*, Broadway's Bible, remarked in its headline: "Cincy wants Bard Alive" (meaning that in Cincinnati, Leslie Howard's stage-production of "Hamlet" did better business than Mr. Howard's Romeo on the screen), it must be remembered that most of our people have neither the opportunity nor the money to see the "Bard Alive." As a means of bringing to a whole people the best there is in drama, nothing can equal the screen of today, and the film of "Romeo and Juliet" in a single week was seen by more people than Mr. Gielgud, Mr. Howard and Mr. Evans could reach during the entire season on the stage in three successful Shakespearean productions. Suppose "The Bard" does not attract to the theater as many one-hundred-per-cent Americans as do Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. What of it? It merely indicates that poetic drama is not, at present, the chosen

fare of the majority. The fact still remains that Shakespeare on the screen can and does attract a far greater audience than has ever had access to him on the stage.

The higher type of producer knows the value of this and is frequently willing to risk money in order to gain prestige for an institution which has not yet fully achieved the place it will ultimately secure among the arts. As Mr. H. M. Warner said recently: "Pictures like 'The Life of Louis Pasteur' and 'Zola' do not make much money but they help the whole industry because they draw people to the motion picture who never have gone before."

But the power to decide what is good photodramatic art and what is not, still rests firmly where it has always rested: in the people's hands. They alone can determine the lines along which the art must develop. Writers, producers and directors cannot force what they think is good art down the people's throats. This is just as well, for the screen's healthy growth demands that its roots lie deep in the people's emotions and psychology. If a picture becomes too "arty" or too academic, it loses that flavor of the soil which makes it an expression of its own audience, and the people will have none of it.

I would have said that "Cavalcade" and "The Informer" were two great pictures. Great pieces of work they undoubtedly were, but the public took neither one to its heart. Why not? Your guess is as good as mine.

Because motion pictures are now actually a part of our drama their fate must depend on popular vote. In every other art some great artists have been discovered after their death: men who were comparatively obscure in their own day, and are now hailed as masters. But not in drama. As far as I know, we call no dramatist great today who was not successful with the people for whom he wrote: no play

which was rejected by its own audience is accepted by ours.

Drama has never been the art of the few, but the art of the many; it must accept the conditions and the limitations which go with that opportunity. If drama would lead the people it must not get too far ahead of them; the public will never follow a leader who is beyond its vision.

The great number of really fine pictures being produced today and their enthusiastic reception by the majority indicate that, at last, pictures have entered their period of maturity. At their best, they have already become an art in which we can take pride *as an art*, and not merely as an important sociological element of modern life. In time the screen will be accepted by the people as a standard of language, of manners and of dress. In conjunction with its invisible cousin, radio, it will educate us musically and open the field of light opera, grand opera and symphony to millions who could have no other chance to learn musical appreciation. And a common love of beauty and music is one of the strongest ties between alien races. There is probably only one country in the world which would kill a master-musician for his political convictions.

The amazing progress which the screen has made in the last ten years does not imply that it has solved all its major problems. Its chief difficulty is the same today as it was twenty years ago: there are not enough good writers, good directors, good actors and good producers to turn out five to seven hundred good feature pictures every year. There probably never will be, for artists have to be born before they can be made; a hen can set for weeks upon a china egg and be disappointed in the end. In the field of drama especially, Nature has never been prolific of artists. After five hundred years of preparation there are pitifully few first-class dramatists writing for the English-speaking stage; and

the speaking photodrama is only ten years old. No Shakespeares, Molières, or Ibsens have yet taken a dominant position on the screen.

Today two conflicting theories of picture-making are struggling to determine which one shall control the future system of production; they are individualism and collectivism. Those factory methods which marked the forced change from silence to sound are, in some cases, yielding to the pressure of artists who desire to control their own work; to preserve its integrity.

Many producers are in sympathy with this point of view, but cannot find enough artists whom they believe strong enough to take full responsibility. They dare not experiment; too much is at stake; they must be sure. Facing the ever-present necessity of turning out at least five hundred films within the year, collectivism appears to be safest; multiple authors, supervised directors, with all major decisions as to story, casting and production passed upon by a committee of associates. Naturally this method tends toward formula. Although subjecting a picture to the consensus of many opinions may remove certain alleged faults, it may also result in a general leveling down, a fatal standardization; moreover, it is difficult for even two people to paint the same picture or to play the same violin at the same time.

One of our strongest directors, Frank Capra, said recently: "If more directors had complete charge over their productions, maybe pictures wouldn't be so much alike."

To which the producers might well have replied: "If we had thirty or forty Frank Capras we might be able to abandon our Soviet system."

Nevertheless, more and more strong individualists are appearing, as the growing number of strikingly good films gives evidence. The factory must ultimately give way to the

studio. The Shakespeares and the Molières will come when the medium is ready for them—or when they *make* it ready. When they do appear they will not be composite men, but individuals, for true art can be created only through the domination of a craft by a creative soul.

The screen of the future will bring forth its own race of giants, those who will work primarily in the medium itself, rather than use it merely to translate material from other fields. That it will be dramatic literature, to be printed and read, is indicated when authors of the stature of H. G. Wells already publish their photoplays in book form. It is only a matter of time before screen plays of literary value will be as widely read as are stage plays today.

As I watch the growth in power and in mind of the splendid work which so frequently appears upon the current screen, I realize how far we have come since those happy, early days when it was all a gay adventure; when the craft was young and the art nothing but a hope. To see an art born and grow to maturity within one's own lifetime is an experience which only workers in motion pictures have enjoyed. To have served so long in that army of earnest, eager boys and girls, men and women, who fought foot by foot to gain new ground, to carry the frontier farther and ever farther, was such a joy that twenty years had passed without my seeing them go.

I believe in the motion picture, now more than ever; in its importance as an art, as a social force, as the first real drama of the whole people that the world has ever seen.

Only one danger threatens its development and its usefulness: the pressure of organized minorities to prevent it from seeking its own paths in its own evolution.

If the motion picture is to be the great art it should be, it must be allowed to find truth through freedom, just as all

democratic institutions can find truth only by being free to search it out.

There are those who fear the screen's power to tell the people what the people themselves are thinking. There are those who consider it dangerous for the people to think for themselves, or to decide for themselves what they shall see, what they shall read, what they shall believe.

These organized groups are the screen's only real enemies. They would limit the subject matter with which a motion picture may deal and, above all, limit what the screen may say about anything of real importance. They would keep the screen forever chanting accepted dogma, instead of letting it sing new songs of truth; they would force its characters to be moral fashion plates instead of human beings.

The screen has learned to talk, and is now learning to think; but even as the stage is still free to help the people know their own minds, so must the screen be free.

For the highest function of motion-picture art is to express the people to themselves. The voice of the screen is the voice of common humanity trying to put into living words its thoughts and emotions, its ideals and its dreams.

THE END

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